WOLAROI'S CUP

AMBROSE PRATT

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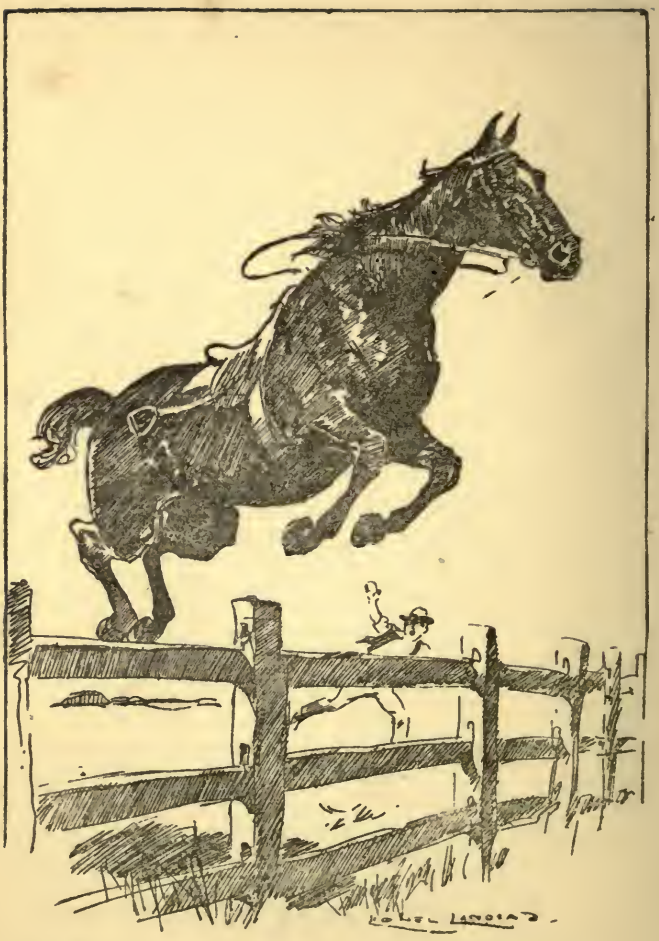

He jumped two fences in his wild career.

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WOLAROI'S CUP

BY

AMBROSE PRATT

Author of "*The Golden Kangaroo*," "*Three Years with Thunderbolt*," *&c.*

With six full page Illustrations by Lionel Lindsay

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CHAPTER I.

"HONOUR THY FATHER."

MY father, Captain Basil Counsel, was killed in the hunting field when I was fourteen years old. I have no recollections of him that are not associated with unhappiness. Because he was a big man who had never experienced a day's illness, and I, an undersized and sickly child, he despised, and shunned me from the cradle. Before I was out of the toddling stage I had learned the lesson that I must not remind my father of my existence. When he was in the house I was obliged to keep to the nursery and, even in that remote domain, to follow the unobtrusive methods of the mouse. My nurses never needed to employ the bogey-man fable to bring me under discipline. It was sufficient for them to say, "Do this, or your father will get you!" On only two occasions did I ever meet my father face to face; the first was on the afternoon of my seventh birthday. I was alone at the moment in my play-room amusing myself with some toys which my mother had given me, when I heard his heavy footfalls on the stairs. I would have known his steps among a thousand. I had heard them often, and always they had been a signal to send me flying in breathless trepidation into hiding. A great terror fell upon me on divining that he intended paying me a visit. I felt no doubt but that a dreadful punishment impended. My mother had gone to spend the day with some

friends, my governess had been given a holiday, and my nurse had stolen away to gossip with the servants in the kitchen. There was nobody to help me. For one horrible moment fear paralysed my faculties. I listened to the steps approaching in a sort of coma, but as the handle turned I leaped to my feet and darted behind the window curtains. Next second my father strode into the room. He carried in his right hand a naked sword. Under his left arm was a belt, a scabbard and a sabretache. He had come to kill me, then. His voice boomed out imperiously, "Clifford!" I clutched at the curtains for support and closed my eyes. In another moment I was seized by the collar and lifted bodily into the room.

"What d'ye mean by hiding from me, you little cub?" he demanded heatedly.

Shaking in every limb I made shift to look at him.

"D'ye suppose I want to eat you?" cried my father. "Pooh! you'd not make a meal for a hungry terrier, and you're the last hope of my race. D'ye see this?"

He pricked me gently with the sword; it was a very little sword.

"Answer me."

"Yes, I see it," I gasped.

"Wouldn't you rather play with a sword than a doll?"

"N'no," I quavered.

For a moment our eyes met. In his was an expression of disdain that hurt me, but it wrought the miracle of replacing terror with a sort of rat-like courage. "I don't want to play with an ugly sword," I said, defiantly. "Muvvie gave me the dolls and I love them."

"Damn your mother!" said my father, and, turning on his heel, he left the room.

Four years later he came to me again. I was no longer the sickly brat of my early childhood, but still a weakling and little better than a dwarf. But I was not destitute of talent, for my brain had outstripped my body in development. My father's second visit was inspired by the fact that I had passed the Junior Public Examination with seven A's.

I had long outgrown my babyish abject fear of him, but its place was occupied with a half resentful, half pitiful disgust. He was an utter stranger to me, and I judged him as a stranger. I disliked him, because he had always neglected me. I pitied him because bad times were clouding his career. He was called "unlucky Counsel," and his steadily increasing losses on the turf were in all men's mouths. I was too young then to realise that he was not exactly "playing the game" to take such risks with his fine fortune. I dimly understood that he was embarked on a course that might impoverish us all, but I fancied it was none of my business to feel offended. His money was his own to play ducks and drakes with if he chose. My mother seemed to hold that view, and I took my every cue from her.

My tutor was explaining a problem in geometry when my father, for the second time, crossed the threshold of my little kingdom. He dismissed my tutor and sank into the vacated chair. Only then I noticed he was not entirely sober. He fixed me with a pair of bloodshot eyes.

"So you've been passing examinations, I hear," he said, unsteadily. "New role for a Counsel, I guess, We've been hard riders and hard livers since the flood, but I never heard of a 'learned Counsel' in the family." He laughed thickly. "Never mind, my boy," he went on after a pause, "I don't want to discourage you.

The Lord knows you'll need your cleverness if the luck doesn't change."

He stood up and moved to the door, his face as black as night. At the threshold he turned, "Tomlins tells me you know how to sit a horse," he rapped out suddenly. Tomlins was my father's trainer. I nodded, wondering what was to follow. He measured me from head to foot with a glance of piercing scorn.

"Tomlins always was a fool," he sneered, "he wants me to let you ride Carnage in the Flying Stakes —an animal with the temper of a hag and a mouth of iron. I think he wants to ruin me. What is your opinion, Clifford? Do you think you could hold an angry rocking-horse?"

He waited for no answer but strode off laughing loudly, leaving me in a state of fury.

A week later the Flying Stakes was run. My father backed Carnage for a fortune, but the horse was left at the post and took no part in the race. There would have been a different story to tell had I been given the mount. Carnage was a rogue with strange hands on his bridle reins, but I had always been able to manage him. I had ridden him daily for weeks in his track work, but that, of course, my father did not know, as I only did such things by stealth, having been forbidden the stables since an infant. I had never respected that particular prohibition. From almost the moment I could walk I used to break bounds whenever an opportunity offered and make by way to the horses. The grooms invariably welcomed and loyally shielded me from discovery. As I grew older it was my custom to arise at daylight and sneak out to the training track, where I was always sure of a couple of exciting gallops. Thus surreptitiously I learned to

ride—and other things; for example, to be secretive and deceitful. A year after the Carnage incident the long impending ruin of our household culminated in my father's bankruptcy. He paid twenty shillings in the pound with the help of my mother's jointure, but there was little salvage from the wreck, barely sufficient to furnish a small cottage at Caulfield, whither we moved to hide ourselves—that is to say my mother and I. My father was too proud to live as a pauper in a country which had known him only as a man of wealth and fashion. He had rich relatives in England and "expectations." He went across the seas intent upon exploiting the former and realising the latter. We never saw him again.

CHAPTER II.

A PRIG IN THE MAKING.

SOON after my father's death my mother confessed that she could not afford to send me to college. I was bitterly disappointed, but I had sufficient decency not to let her see it, and I went with apparent cheerfulness to a State school instead. Merely because of this paltry unselfishness I took liberty to adjudge myself a hero. Having begun to be a prig, it was easy to continue. I worked hard at my books, not alone because I loved work, but also because I craved fresh cause of self-satisfaction. Before long I won a scholarship which entitled me to three years free tuition at a High School. Thus was the problem of my education solved. Eaten up with conceit I conceived ambitions as vast as they were silly. And I set forth to realise them, too. Early and late I studied, studied furiously. Other boys might waste their holidays at cricket or football, or spend their evenings on idle pleasures, not I. I spent my days at school, my evenings with my books, and I scorned the thought of holidays—a son for any mother to rejoice in, eh? Little beast that I was, I never thought of studying my mother. Never once did I think of asking how she contrived to keep the little home together. That she might be toiling to support me was an idea which never invaded my priggish consciousness.

Enlightenment came at last with the unexpectedness of a thunderbolt. One unforgettable Sunday afternoon I was indulging in a rest I thought that I deserved. I had just won a second scholarship entitling me to enter the Melbourne University and to become anything I chose or could at the cost of the State. The occasion seemed to excuse a little relaxaation, and I lay upon the couch in the sitting room steeped in pleasant dreams; alternately debating the professions of law and medicine and conceitedly contemplating the industry which had brought me to that exalted pass. My mother did not know I was at home, for she had begged me some little while before to take a stroll for my health's sake and I had consented. I had dreamed three-fourths of the afternoon away when I became conscious of voices in the next room. I recognised them easily. My mother was conversing with Mrs. O'Brien, the wife of a wheelwright, who occupied the cottage adjoining ours. Mrs. O'Brien had one of those high-pitched trebles that carry everywhere and always irritate. I tried to exclude the exasperating sounds, but without suecess. Finally I listened. This is what I heard:—

"I'm not denying Clifford is a smart lad, Mrs. Counsel, and I daresay if he was me own son I'd work me fingers to the bone to push him on. But I'd not be after spoiling him. Faix! Mrs. Counsel the way you let him act the gintleman wid you would make a cat laugh. So he wouldn't eat his egg and bacon for lunch, the spalpeen, because—ah! but ye nadent deny it, Mrs. Counsel, for sure I heard him meself. He told you it was not a dish for mid-day at all, at all, the vagabond. And you at your wits' end to git him anything substantial, and ating nothing but bread and butter yourself at any meal the last fortnight."

My mother's answer was very low, but I heard it too distinctly, "Clifford is worth every sacrifice I could possibly make for him. Believe me, dear Mrs. O'Brien, I am deeply grateful for all the kindness you have shown me, but I cannot allow you to reflect upon my son. Besides, you are wrong in your assumptions. Clifford has always been accustomed to delicate food, he needs it, and he has no idea that I have experienced any difficulty in obtaining it. The poor lad works so devotedly at his studies that he fails to notice little things."

Mrs. O'Brien's sharp voice broke out again, "Little things," she repeated with a sniff. "It's the little things that count, I'm thinkin'. You'll be telling me next he doesn't know you've taken to the charrin', and that he eats the bread you earn by scrubbin' dirty floors and holy-stonin' doorsteps."

"He does not know and I would not have him know for worlds," replied my mother. "Clifford thinks we have enough to live on, and it would break my heart to disillusion him. He is a high-spirited boy and he would seek employment if he dreamed that things are as they are with me. And that would be the end of his career. No, no, Mrs. O'Brien, you must not sympathise with me. It is my happiness to work for my son, and it is my duty to help him."

"Musha! Mrs. Counsel, I've just got to say it: your boy must be blind and deaf for all his brains, or he'd see in a minit you're nothing but a walkin' skeleton with a church-yard cough."

Mrs. O'Brien was in full swing, but I waited for no more. Moments earlier I had risen from the couch, startled inexpressibly. The more I heard the more horrified I became; but the final revelation simply appalled me. My mother "a walking skeleton with a

church-yard cough!" And it was true. Immediately the words were spoken I realised how accurate they were; realised, too, the selfishness that had hitherto prevented me from actively appreciating a condition which obviously must have impressed my subconscious faculties. I stole out of the room and from the house with the motions and feelings of a criminal. For the first time in my life I saw my real self, and the picture did not please me. I ran from it. Literally I ran away from it; ran for miles. When physical exhaustion brought me to a pause I was far on the road to Dandenong and almost in the open country. But the picture had pursued and overtaken me. I might escape the sight and censorship of others, but I could not escape myself. The high comedy of my dream life had become a sordid little tragedy. My hero had suddenly discovered himself no hero, but a mean and pitiful pretender—a leaner, half a strutting jackdaw, half a parasite. I am not tempted to labour the indictment. The criminal pleaded guilty and prayed for an opportunity to redeem himself. I returned home that miserable evening to find my mother had prepared a dainty little supper for my entertainment. It was the first of my self-inflicted punishments to eat it to the last crumb, though every mouthful gave me torture. Her pleasure to see me eat was the last straw. I kept my composure with a prodigious effort until we said good-night, but once in my own room I broke down utterly, and my childhood vanished from me while I wept.

CHAPTER III.

CAULFIELD RACE COURSE.

ALL night long I lay wakeful upon my bed, and my thoughts ran on and on like the tide of an endless sea. Two resolutions emerged from that turgid meditation. I must abandon the idea of a professional career, and I must discover some means of supporting my mother.

At the flush of dawn I arose and dressed. My head ached and I felt a great need to go out into the open air. Entering the street which our cottage fronted, my steps inclined towards the big public reserve that is best known as the Caulfield Race Course. Except on race days this reserve is open to the public, and is used as a recreation ground by the local population. I had often spent an afternoon with my books on the central area, and I liked the place because of its expansiveness and quietude. Although the sun was not yet visible I found the gates open to admit a formidable string of thoroughbreds which were about to take their morning exercise on the training tracks that ringed the park.

Absorbed in the question that obsessed my mind—the question of breadwinning—I strode aimlessly across the heath, and it was not until I was brought up by the rails at a spot almost opposite the Grand Stand that I looked up from the ground. At

He came at me open-mouthed—a veritable demon.

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that moment two horses passed me at a gallop. Involuntarily I followed them with my eyes. They made the turn under the whip, and a fine struggle succeeded up the straight, one, a big bay, eventually winning by a short half length. There was no more troublous thought for me that morning. The problems that had worried me throughout the night vanished into nothingness. I shouted with exultation when the bay won, and afterwards strained every sense to witness the start of half a dozen sprinters. Just as the horses leaped away the sun over-topped a blue-black barrier of pines and flung a shaft of golden light upon the racers. It was a sight to make the sickest heart rejoice. I realised suddenly that the air was mild and still and full of blossom-scented sweetness, and that it was very good indeed to be alive. A weedy looking chestnut won that race. "Well done!" I yelled and tossed my cap into the air. It fell a dozen feet away.

As I stooped to recover it I saw between the rails a riderless bay horse approaching me along the track at a hand gallop, his bridle reins trailing and tapping on his knees. Impulsively I darted out upon the track and put myself directly in his path. He snorted and swerved without diminishing his pace. But I snatched at the bridle—thrown outwards by his swerve—and held it fast. I have often wondered what would have been my destiny had I failed to catch and hold that thong. But perhaps these things are decreed, and I could not have failed nor have done other than I did. And, indeed, it was not a time for speculation. The horse was a big three-year-old colt; frightened and a fighter. He dragged me fifty yards and when he paused he swung round as on a pivot and came at me open-mouthed—a veritable

demon. I dodged his first blackguard rush, and before he could make another I was under and through the rails—luckily I was very near them—and I still held the reins. It was all up with him then, for by jerking the bridle taut, as I did instinctively, I got his jaw levered firmly against the wood. A single twist and he was helplessly imprisoned. Thus we stood and looked at each other for a few seconds.

I was born a coward, but not of horses—even of a wicked scamp like the bay, for somehow or another I seemed naturally to understand them. In half a minute I felt convinced, despite the bay's flattened ears and furiously rolling eyes, that he had no real wish to hurt me. I can't explain how I knew it, but I knew thoroughly that he had not tried to "savage" me out of malice, but out of terror and a desire to be free, and I knew also he was afraid that I would punish him. Simultaneously with these convictions there swam into my memory one of the pet sayings of old Tomlins (my father's trainer):—"If ever a horse gets you in a corner, laugh at him." There is a strange quality in human laughter that always either mystifies or startles lesser brutes, throws them out of their stride, so to speak. It is a thing they cannot do and cannot comprehend. I believe it brings them sharply up against the psychological chasm which separates mankind from the rest of the animal kingdom. But that is only my guess.

Whatever be the reason, the fact remains that laughter is a force excellent to use in dominating fractious horses, and I have very frequently employed it to my own advantage. I began to laugh at the bay and with the promptest possible effect. He ceased to roll his eyes, stopped his impotent pulling and pricked up his ears. Perceiving that I had interested him at

least partially out of his frantic mood I set to work to cajole him with remonstrant but soothing talk. In a short space he was sufficiently tranquilised to let me fondle his black muzzle. I thereupon gave him a loose rein, and still talking to him coaxingly and incessantly, I slipped under the rails and stood confidently before him. In a flash he planted his feet and flung back trembling on his haunches, crouching as a cat might for a spring. But another laugh diverted his design, and he came gradually to his height again, influenced by my chiding voice, and perhaps, too, by the evident diminutiveness of his antagonist. I tried to make him feel ashamed. I told him it was disgraceful for a great animal like him to be afraid of a pigmy, and that he ought to wear skirts and inhabit a nursery. Never was a horse more ridiculously bullied; but I did not realise the absurdity of my conduct, then. I was very indignant and very earnest, and I had forgotten everything except that I must make that bay listen to reason. And he listened, too. Within three minutes he was as docile as a sheep. To complete his subjugation I handled him all over, not ceasing to admonish him the while. Finally I led him to the rail and using it as a style I climbed into the saddle.

"Now, you rascal," I cried, "you'll repay me for my trouble by giving me a gallop."

Hardly were the words uttered, however, when I perceived a man seated on the back of a stout cob that was standing in the centre of the track about eighty yards away. The man was regarding me intently, and I felt sure of two things on the spot. I felt certain that he owned the bay, and also that he had been an attentive spectator of the little controversy the history of which I have related. In one second my face was

burning to recall the many silly things I poured forth in my preoccupation with the bay. The man must have heard them all. How he must have chuckled and laughed at me; confound him! And I was to be robbed of my gallop, too. The bay was very ready to run a race with the wind, but I checked him and trotted slowly towards the man on the cob, wishing him in Spain or dead and buried. As I approached I angrily searched his face for a sign of the mirth that I suspected I had caused him. He was a stout person of later middle age with grizzled hair and a rubicund complexion. His eyes were so kindly as their glance met mine that my anger vanished and I gave him smile for smile as I reined up the bay.

"Your colt?" I asked, preparing to dismount.

"Don't get off, lad," he answered, "unless, of course, you want to I'll be obliged if you'd ride him round to the paddock."

"Why, certainly," I agreed delightedly, "I've not had a ride for years and I like this chap immensely. What's his name? May I gallop him?"

"His name is Pinto. No, please, take him easy. He's done more than enough already for one day, the ill-tempered devil: five furlongs in one six, and put a boy in hospital. Where did you learn to handle rogues, my lad?"

"Rogues!" I exclaimed, "Pinto is not a rogue, he's a beauty; aren't you, Pinto?" and I leaned forward to stroke the bay's neck.

"I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you set him free and face him," declared the man, "I daren't call out lest he'd tear you to pieces. He's the worst brute in my stable, and as vicious a beast as I've ever had to deal with, and I've trained for Dick Morland these fifteen years."

I gazed at him in astonishment. "Surely you are joking," I protested, "why, look at him, he's as quiet as a rocking horse."

"You've bewitched him," declared the trainer; then on a sudden he cried, "Look out, lad. This way, quick!" and he spurred to the outer edge of the track. I followed swiftly, the bay moving forward with an easy spring. Four horses were approaching us at top speed from the stand side, racing in a close bunch. Pinto cocked up his ears and began to dance, but I had no real trouble to hold him, and once the horses had swept by he responded quickly to my voice. The trainer looked on with an approval I thought exaggerated, but, of course, it pleased me. In another moment we were ambling around the course, chatting as we went. But we had no time to bore each other, for we drew up presently before a group of grooms and horses and stable boys, and both dismounted. Pinto amiably permitted me to fondle his muzzle again by way of farewell, and a couple of grooms somewhat gingerly took charge of him; but beyond flattening his ears he showed not a sign of wickedness. I was about to nod good-bye to the trainer and return home, when he unexpectedly addressed me. "If you'd still like a gallop, my lad, say the word and I'll give you a mount."

"Rather!" was the only word I could utter. He smiled and looked me up and down for a moment appraisingly. "What would you scale," he asked. "About seven nine?"

"You're a stone out, sir. It's my height that misled you. I'm five feet six, but my bones are small. I weigh six nine with my clothes on."

"Made to order, by jingo!" he exclaimed. "Well, we'll see how you ride." He turned to the group,

"Strip Muffler and Sadie, Stainer; you'll take the mare." He swung round to me again, "What's your name, my lad?"

"Clifford," I replied, giving my Christian name unthinkingly.

He nodded. "Mine's Hilliard," he remarked, and he strode forward to help with the saddling of a compact chestnut gelding which the grooms had just unrugged. Guessing the chestnut to be Muffler, I followed him and fitted the stirrups to my arm's length. The groom, George, obligingly gave me a hand to foot, and a moment later I was astride. Stainer, a sharp-faced youngster, was already on top of Sadie, a skittish brown filly.

"Take them gently to the six furlong post; start standing and ride them out," directed Mr. Hilliard, and as he spoke he handed me a whip. Sadie was already a dozen lengths away. The chestnut darted after her, straining at his bit; but except for a hard mouth I found him an easy horse to manage, and I kept him bowling at Sadie's heels until she pulled up at the starting post. At this point a man was stationed with a flag, who took charge of us. Stainer, on Sadie, got the better of my inexperience at the start and secured a lead of three lengths. But I drew almost even at the turn, and when we both settled down to ride I had no doubt of the result. It's a poor horseman who cannot tell the upshot of a race before he reaches the distance, whether his opponents are behind or before him. The knowledge comes to you through channels of sympathy and instinct. You feel it in your blood, and it is a thing that cannot be defined, only divined. And a mistake is just about impossible. My ride on Muffler was a happy one, because I felt I must win as soon as we swept into the straight. And I was right.

At the half distance I had Sadie beaten. From that instant I came right away, and riding Muffler out as I had been instructed I won by four lengths.

"Very good," said Mr. Hilliard, as I slipped from the saddle, "very good indeed; you need machine practice, but you finished like an expert. Happen to be looking for a job, my lad?"

The question startled me so much that I could do no more than gaze at my questioner. Mr. Hilliard ignored my confusion. He went on speaking. "Redmount is a blue-ribbon stable, Clifford, and it is not often we have a vacancy. But I know stuff when I see it, and I'm prepared to make room for you. Where was your last place and why did you leave it?"

My answer was given on impulse, without any sort of calculation.

"I have been at school in Melbourne for the last three years, and not doing any other work at all. Before then I lived in New South Wales."

"Where did you learn to ride?"

"At Captain Counsel's station on the Murrumbidgee. I was brought up there."

"Ah! then you must have known poor old Jerry Tomlins, who died last month at Flemington."

"Tomlins dead!" I exclaimed. "Oh! I am sorry. He taught me everything I know about horses. He used to let me ride the racers in their training."

Mr. Hilliard nodded his head. "You had a good master, my lad, one of the best. I might have guessed it when I saw you handling Pinto and laughing at him over yonder. That was one of old Jerry's pet tricks. How old are you?"

"Going on for eighteen, sir."

"As old as that? Then you must be nearly done growing and you only weigh six nine. Humph! I

said you were made to order. Have you ever ridden in public?"

"No, sir."

"So much the better. We'll spring a surprise on somebody one of these fine days. You were born for a jockey and I'll see you get a show. For the present, however, you'll have to mark time and make yourself a journeyman. You can't learn any trade top-downwards. Bottom-upwards is the one and only way. Come up to Redmount this afternoon at two sharp and I'll introduce you to Mr. Morland. Better bring your father with you."

"He died three years ago."

"So, so—well come alone then. It doesn't matter." He held out his hand. "Good morning to you, my lad."

I hesitated for an instant, then blurted out; "It all depends on the pay, sir. My mother is ill and I've got to find a job that will keep her. So it's no use in me going to see Mr. Morland unless—unless—" I could not finish the sentence.

Mr. Hilliard laughed as he answered, "There's no sweating done at Redmount, Clifford. But we like punctuality, so don't forget—two sharp."

How I left the enclosure I haven't an idea. My head was swimming, and I seemed to be treading on air.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. O'BRIEN.

I found my mother in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Her hacking cough was the first sound I heard on entering the house. She looked pitifully frail, but her cheeks were scarlet and she gave me a smile as I went forward to kiss her good morning.

"Mother," I said, as I held her in my arms, "you are in a fever. You must go back to bed and I'll fetch a doctor to see you. Now, no protests, for I won't listen to them. Do you know where I've been? I've been out on business, with a capital B. I have accepted an excellent billet that will keep us both comfortably and with splendid prospects of advancement, too; infinitely better than any professional career would offer. But nothing more about it now. You must wait until you are quite well again, and then we'll have a celebration. The immediately important thing is for you to be nursed. You have worked for me long enough. It's my turn to coddle you now."

Purposely I spoke authoritatively, for I dared not yet reveal the nature of the work that I was about to embrace, being aware of the horror in which my mother held the turf and its associations, and I was in a panic as to her condition. I had been prepared for her to resist, but I was unprepared for what she did. She broke into a storm of weeping and collapsed

in my arms. I carried her to her room, and pigmy as I was, her weight did not distress me. She was a mere wisp. My feelings may be better imagined than described. I needed nobody to tell me then of the sacrifices she had made on my account. It is hard to write of that grey time. I put her to bed and fled in an agony of apprehension to the nearest doctor—a grim old Scot named Ducie; I prayed him as I might have prayed to Providence, to save my mother's life, promising to work my fingers to the bone to pay his fees if only he would serve me in the meanwhile. Dr. Ducie said little, but he put on his hat and accompanied me home. He was nearly twenty minutes in my mother's room and I lived as many lifetimes as I waited. When he came out he beckoned me to the verandah. "She is ill, my boy," he said, "but with good nursing she ought to recover. I suggested a hospital but she would not hear of it. She said she would rather die. Such a prejudice must be humoured in a woman of your mother's character. I shall send my own nurse to her immediately. You can accommodate her, I suppose?"

"She can have my room," I stammered eagerly, "but—but—how can I pay—"

The Doctor raised his hand. "I shall be responsible for her charges," he declared. "They shall go down in the bill that I shall ultimately send to you. Don't worry about that at present. Time enough, time enough. Good morning, my boy; I'll come round again this evening."

And the good Samaritan strode away, leaving me wet-eyed but speechless. Within an hour Nurse Gorme appeared, a stout capable-looking Scotswoman of middle age, who took entire charge of the establishment and with equal rapidity won my mother's

confidence and my whole-souled gratitude. But there still remained a duty to perform. My mother's purse was empty and my mother must be fed, not to speak of the nurse, and medicines must be bought and paid for. For a poignant period I racked my brain to discover one friend that I might turn to. Then I stripped my pride in tatters and went to call on Mrs. O'Brien—the woman who had unwittingly revealed to me the thing that I had been. She opened to my first knock and received me with a whirl of words:—

"An' phwy couldn't ye have called me in to nurse your mother? What nade was there av bringin' in a high and mighty learned ladybody? Is it a millionaire yez are, Clifford Counsel, Esquoire? Don't moind me, me dear. Is she very bad, poor darling? Me heart was bleedin' to see her any time this week past. I ran in to her while ye was gone for the Doctor, laddie, and she told me you've taken a billit. God bless ye for doin' the right thing at last, Cliff; sure your mother's one in a thousand, and she's that proud of ye and what ye're afther doing for her—it will help her finely to get well. Is there a thing I can do for ye, Cliff? Say it and have it. We're not gintlefolk like yer mother was wance, me dear, but we've got hearts in our bodies. Me man only said to me this mornin', he says, 'She's a lady, Norah,' he says, 'a lady born and bred,' he says, 'and she's not to want for friends while the O'Briens is next door to her.' What is it ye're wanting, Clifford?"

"I want the loan of two pounds, Mrs. O'Brien," I answered humbly. "I'll pay you back if I live. We—we've little or no food in the house—and—and—the Doctor says———"

"Niver another word," cried Mrs. O'Brien. "Go back home an' I'll come to ye as soon as I've been to the savings bank!"

With that the fussy old lady slammed the door on my face. Ah! but she was an angel.

When she arrived it was with a great armful of parcels, each containing some necessary cupboard requisite; and before she left she forced three sovereigns into my reluctant palm. Fate thus destined me to start my battle with the world burdened with a mass of loving obligations. The load seemed very heavy then and hard to bear, but I can look back on it now and bless each kindly hand that helped to fasten it upon my shoulders.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEW STABLE BOY.

PROMPTLY at two o'clock I rang the bell at Redmount gates. A very old man opened and directed me to the mansion. Till then I had fancied the lodge itself to be Mr. Morland's dwelling; but a turn in the path revealed a big Elizabethan house nestling in a grove of pine trees, which made the lodge look a cottage. Quite a considerable settlement lay within the walls of the domain, the existence of which no stranger might guess from the road, so high and thick was the double hedge of cypress that encompassed the grounds. Six red-roofed cottages flanked the eastern boundary, separated from the terraced gardens of the mansion by tall and carefully trimmed hedges of cypress; and beyond them to the north were the stables, with pine-girt open paddocks beyond. As I climbed to the broad paved verandah a powerful impulse urged me to carry my insignificance elsewhere. How could the owner of such princely wealth need the services of such as I? But I did not surrender to my nervousness, although it controlled me to beat an insolent tattoo upon the knocker. A gorgeous flunkey appeared and I confided my name to his splendid yellow stomacher, not daring to raise my eyes to his portentous face. I walked at his gilded heels, as in

a dream, through an immense trophy-spangled hall into a brightly lighted apartment that was furnished much in the fashion of a lawyer's office.

"Mister Clifford," intoned the flunkey, and he vanished as he spoke. Confronting me across a pedestal desk was a gentleman of about five and fifty years. His hair was stiff and thick and grizzled, he wore a short pointed beard, he had a narrow forehead, a slightly hooked nose, and deep-set grey eyes. Beside him on his left hand stood Mr. Hilliard, the trainer. Mr. Hilliard nodded as I entered, but Mr. Morland gave me a cold appraising stare.

"Good morning," he said briefly, then jerked around to the trainer. "How old did you say?" he demanded.

"Eighteen, sir."

"He looks eleven," Mr. Morland gazed at me again. "What's your weight?"

"Six stone nine, sir."

"Health good?"

"Yes."

"Yes 'sir'—if you please."

"Yes, sir."

"You rode Muffler this morning I'm told. Are your hands sore?"

"No, sir."

"Do you drink?"

"No, sir."

"Smoke?"

"Yes, sir."

"Cigarettes?"

"Yes, sir."

"Poison! you should take to the pipe. You support a widowed mother?"

"I want to, sir."

"You will if you're not a waster. I have no use

for wasters." He turned to Hilliard. "All right, Hilliard, you can try him. He has an honest face. Start him at forty shillings." He glanced at me once more. "You can go, my lad. Good day to you."

I was a good deal hurt by the curt arrogance of Mr. Morland's demeanour, but I had hardly left the house when a hand fell upon my shoulder and a kind voice said:—"Cheer up, laddie. No need to look chapfallen. Old Davie can't help his manner. He's always like that, but underneath it he is one of the best—a real white man. And it's a sure thing that he's taken a fancy to you, for he never asked you for a character."

Mr. Hilliard set me to work polishing bits in the harness room, patiently instructing me to do the thing properly. After his departure I had visitors. First there lounged in a wisp of a lad with an old and rather evil face. Having propped himself against a rack he watched me for a few moments, then said: "Name's Clifford, I hear?"

I nodded.

"Mine's Christopher Key—Chris. Key for short; but Whiskey to me cobbers. I saw yer ridin' Muffler this mornin'. You'll pass in a crowd with a bit of shovin'. I'm first jockey to the Redmount stable. I s'pose ye've got another monnicker—what yer cobbers call yer, eh? I guess it for Thomas. What?"

"How did you guess it? I demanded whimsically.

He smiled, showing a villainous set of black and yellow teeth. "Sort of hinstinck," he replied. "I'll call yer Tommy. You can call me Whiskey, if ye like.

He was so pleased with his supposed cleverness that I hesitated to undeceive him, and a moment later he introduced me as Tommy to three newcomers, another jockey, a groom and a boy for riding exercise. Dur-

ing the afternoon I met the rest of the staff, about fifteen men and boys all told; and between the intervals of several trifling jobs I was initiated into the mysteries of the establishment, shown the horses and informed of their breeding and records. I have since examined many larger racing stables, but I have never seen a more elaborately equipped institution than Redmount. It contained accommodation for five and twenty thoroughbreds, and for each horse there was provided an alternate stall. The arrangements for sewering, heating and ventilation were perfect, and the most scrupulous housewife could have found nothing to complain of in the order and cleanliness that prevailed. Above the stalls were rows of commodious store-rooms, stocked with different sorts of equine requisites; and the third storey consisted of a feed chamber from which measured quantities of food could be conveyed by pneumatic pipes to the eating boxes and mangers in the stalls. That which most impressed me was a beautifully constructed infirmary situated at a little distance from the stables and isolated therefrom by high brick walls. The hospital contained four "beds" for sick horses; an operating room furnished with every appurtenance of the veterinary art, and a dispensary fitted and stocked as attractively as any druggist's shop.

Everything I saw surprised and delighted me, and all the hands received me so pleasantly that the hours took wings and the day was done before I knew it.

I returned home to find my mother a little better. We had a talk, and I was reluctantly obliged to confess to her the nature of my employment. She wept when she realised that I was nothing but a stable boy, but was mysteriously comforted when she learned that I had accidentally changed my name to Tommy Clifford,

I had really intended to put this matter right with Mr. Hilliard and my stable companions on the morrow, being unwilling to sail in any sense under false colours; but at my mother's urging I forebore and thenceforward I was Tommy Clifford only, on the turf

CHAPTER VI.

JOCKEY CLIFFORD.

MY student apprenticeship in the Redmount stable lasted five years. During that time I did a vast amount of riding work, but I never once rode in a public race. The fault was my own. After the first year Mr. Hilliard frequently offered me mounts, but I shrank from taking the final plunge, and he did not press me. I believe, indeed, that he was pleased to find me unwilling to become a jockey, because I was more useful to him in other ways. I possessed a rather unusual natural gift for handling and taming bad-tempered horses, and every big stable has its quota of that sort. Never a string of "youngsters" but contains a proportion that is difficult to train, and we were always strong in two-year-olds, which came to us from Mr. Morland's stud farm on the Murrumbidgee. The bad ones were invariably turned over to my care, and I had not a few successes with them. It is true that not all the horses I tamed won races, but that was a matter outside my province. Practice developed my peculiar gift to such a degree at length that I was given almost complete charge of the business of breaking in, and I confess I loved the work. At the end of a year my salary was doubled. And that was not my only "rise."

Before two years had gone it became a custom with Mr. Hilliard to consult me on the eve of any important

race meeting in which the Redmount horses were engaged. It began more or less by accident. We had at that period a horse in training named Ixion. He was a stoutly-bred gelding with a pedigree running back to Galopin, and no more beautiful creature ever trod the tracks. He was fast, too, for he could get five furlongs on the sand in 1.3 when he liked. But he had one strange idiosyncrasy which I had discovered while riding him in exercise. He would never do his best while running with a mare or a filly. For some reason his form would never ring true on such occasions. More than once I had mentioned my discovery to the trainer, but he declared the notion too absurd for discussion. Mr. Hilliard had saved Ixion for a six furlong race at Flemington, and when the day came he proposed to back the gelding for a considerable stake. Now, I felt certain that Ixion would not win, for several mares were entered, and one, Soloist, that belonged to a Ballarat sportsman, was rather brilliant, as we all knew, for we had seen her gallop. But Mr. Hilliard would not give Soloist a chance against Ixion. When the day came I was directed to give Ixion a short early morning sprint. He had never been in better heart, and he did his three furlongs on the grass in 35½ seconds—a really wonderful performance. As I dismounted Mr. Hilliard came up to me brimming over with delight. "Well, young man," he cried, "what do you think of his chance now? Pish! he'll beat Soloist by a street. It's a cakewalk for him."

"I do not agree," I replied, "and I'll wager my week's screw that the mare will finish in front of Ixion."

"Damn it, it's a bet," he rapped out angrily, "and I'll make you part up, too, my lad, if only to fix a lesson in your memory." I did not attend the races.

I never did in those days, but I strolled out late in the afternoon and bought a paper. Soloist had won by two lengths and Ixion did not even get a place, although he had started an even money favourite. Mr. Hilliard paid up next morning, and so far from showing any annoyance he took me aside and asked my advice on Ixion's future running. My counsel was simple, "Run him, but don't back him again until he has a chance to fight it out with horses only." Mr. Hilliard did as I advised. He entered Ixion in half a dozen mixed races, in all of which he ran nowhere, Then came his opportunity. It was at Epsom. Two mares had been entered, but by good luck both were scratched on the course. Mr. Hilliard seized the occasion and backed Ixion at an extravagantly long price. The gelding got the verdict, and Mr. Hilliard won £1,000. What Mr. Morland won I dare not guess, but it must have been a large sum, for Ixion's victory was town talk for weeks, and people whispered that another turf swindle had been perpetrated for which a less prominent and wealthy sportsman than David Morland would have been "rubbed out for life." That, of course, was nonsense; but it must be admitted that the *coup* could not be defended easily in a Court of Honour. But who looks for such abstractions on the turf? Probably my moral declension dated from that period. Mr. Hilliard gave me £50, and I had few scruples in accepting it. Already, perhaps, the bloom of my integrity had worn thin; yet it is a fact that I spent the windfall in giving my mother a holiday in Tasmania. While she was absent I fretted at my failure to live up to the standard which I had fixed for the government of my personal conduct when I first joined the Redmount stable; but when she returned looking her old self for the change, I ceased repining.

After that my decadence was rapid, but engineered with cunning and discretion. I made up my mind by hook or by crook to become rich. What mattered the means as long as the end was decent? And the end I held in view was to restore my mother to the social status of her birthright. The curse of such questionable good intentions is that they degenerate progressively in proportion with the quality of means employed to further them. I gave up the private studies which for nearly two years had preserved me from sinking to the lower levels, and I devoted my holidays to race-courses and my leisure hours to low companions. Mr. Hilliard merely noted the external changes in me, and he applied them to the stable benefit. Seeing that I had no longer an objection to attend race-meetings he gave me a business reason to attend them; and from that time forth my duties were enlarged to comprise executing commissions for the stable in the betting ring. With experience I discovered methods of making money without risking my own. As my face became familiar to the regular frequenters of the turf and my association with the Redmount stable became known, the "whisperers" and "ear-biters" began to assail me. I got to know all these gentry very soon and to understand their habits of procedure. Always they would select a moment when I was alone in the stall with a horse and Mr. Hilliard was out of sight. Then one of them would saunter past, talking while in ear shot. "Will so and so win such and such a race? I'll make it worth your while to tell me. Just nod your head. I'll see you afterwards."

One day I nodded in the spirit of experiment. The "ear-biter" fled to the betting ring and informed his clientele of punters, who backed the horse. By sheer accident the horse won, and about half an hour later I

got my reward. It was a £1 note which the grateful "ear-biter" slipped into my hand as he passed me in a crush with a discreet unrecognising stare. The law of the salt, of course, forbade me giving "tips" to such agents against the interest of the stable, and it is mere justice to myself to state that I never offended this law. But I seldom lacked information to dispense, and there was a sufficiency of it worth acting upon to bring in a steady profit with none save the "ear-biters" the wiser. My stable associates did the same thing and bragged about it. I never bragged. I coveted a reputation for scrupulousness and gained with it a reputation for stupidity. It was a stock-in-trade that served me well.

Mr. Hilliard was no fool. He understood the temptations to which stable boys are subjected, and he trusted none of us until he realised the curious esteem in which my companions held me. Even then he was loth to make an exception to his rule, and he watched me for a couple of months before he did. At first I could not guess the reason of his covert espionage, and thought myself suspected unjustly of some irregularity. Sometimes, indeed, I distrusted the instinct that warned me I was being watched. But a little watching on my own account taught me that my instinct was right, and I deliberately undertook to outwit my watcher. It is no credit to me that I succeeded. Mr. Hilliard wanted to be convinced that I was trustworthy, and to win his confidence cost me little inconvenience. I lost a few pounds thereby, but my reward was ample. One evening Mr. Hilliard knocked at the door of my mother's cottage while were having supper.

"Already!" I muttered, as I heard his voice enquiring for me of our little maid. To my mother's sur-

prise I kept him waiting several minutes. "Dear," said she, "he is your employer; ought you not to go to him at once?" I smiled at her and answered, "Not immediately, little mother. It is his first visit here, made without appointment, and I want him to realise that he has invaded the household of a gentleman, although a stable boy. He is an observant man. Give him leisure and he will examine our pictures and read the titles of my books. All that will impress him, and I want him to be impressed, because I have an idea he has business to discuss with me, and I desire the discussion to be raised above the usual plane on which we meet. For the same reason I'd like you to accompany me when I—please, dear—for I particularly want him to see that my mother is a lady." She had been about to demur, but my quick appeal overcame her scruples. "As Mrs. Counsel?" she asked, "remember he only knows you as Clifford, dear."

"As my mother," I said, gravely.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAINER'S SURPRISE.

MR. HILLIARD was studying the contents of my bookshelves when we entered. He swung round with an exclamation which he checked on seeing my companion. He looked as surprised as I could wish. "Permit me to present Mr. Hilliard to you, Mother," I said quietly. "Mr. Hilliard, my mother."

She received him in a manner that delighted me, most sweetly, as indeed she could not help, yet with a dignity that suavely separated all of us and suggested terraces of breeding. She remained in the room a bare five minutes, but the time was sufficient for a notable achievement. It was expressed in the way that Mr. Hilliard hurried awkwardly to open the door for her, and bowed over her hand and returned to me wide-eyed and momentarily bereft of speech. I had hardly waved him to a chair when the maid entered with decanter, glasses and tobacco. Mr. Hilliard declined refreshment and refused a cigar. He fanned himself with his hat. I lighted a cigarette, impishly enjoying his embarrassment. "How the deuce did you ever come to—to—?" he stammered at length. "To join Redmount stable?" I enquired "Pish! I thought I had told you years ago. My mother fell desperately ill, and I was just about penniless."

"But afterwards?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Jobs are scarce and I have always been fond of horses. I confess that I had other ambitions once, but they needed qualities which I don't possess, and money. I took and kept the line of least resistance."

"And your mother, Clifford?"

"She is growing reconciled, I think. Even yet she dislikes my occupation, but she has ceased to be afraid of it. She knows that it contents me and she believes I can remain a gentleman (forgive my seeming arrogance) in spite of it."

Mr. Hilliard indulged himself with an explosion he had long and gallantly restrained.

"Damn my buttons!" he exclaimed. "If this don't beat all I ever heard of. You'll tell me next you read them books: John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and what not? And you in my stable, breaking in two-year-olds, riding exercise and placing commissions at four quid a week."

"I used to read them," I said gently, "but I am sorry to say I have grown lazy of late."

Mr. Hilliard neither heard nor heeded me.

"And I came here to-night," he went on, "to fix up a scheme with a stable boy to claim prentice allowance and ride Traumerei in the Jumpers' Flat at Mooney Valley, Saturday. No wonder you'd never put up silk in public, Clifford. I've guessed at reasons, but I never came near this. Well, I'll go. No use putting funny propositions to a man with a mother like yours. But I'll ask you to forget what I've said, Mister Clifford, about Traumerei, I mean."

"Hasty, rather, aren't you?" I demanded.

"What?" he cried, "you wouldn't do it?"

"Why not? All in the game, isn't it? D'ye think I want to live always from hand to mouth? Fact is,

I'm determined to make the plunge and be a jock. It's the only way to make big money and that's what I'm after."

"But your mother, Clifford?" He eyed me like a weazel.

"Her name," said I, "is Counsel, mine too. Clifford is my Christian name. I'm glad you know at last. It's been on my conscience for five years. I'd ride, of course, as Tommy Clifford. We are speaking in confidence to-night."

"Good God! Good God!" gasped Mr. Hilliard. "Now I know who you are. The likeness puzzled me the moment I clapped eyes on you. Your father was Captain Basil Counsel, who owned Metaphor and Simile and won the Sydney Stakes with Ortolano."

"Right—but, remember, in strict confidence, Mr. Hilliard. For myself I don't care a rap, but I have mother to consider."

"Straight wire,' 'he answered solemnly. "I won't even tell King David, if you say so."

"Him least of all."

"It'll be as you say, my lad. Good Lord! you've given me an eye-opener to-night. I bought Mazarino off your father in '92; gave £930 for him. And you've been—dang my buttons—it don't seem right, somehow. He had thousands to burn when I knew him, and one of the best strings in Australia."

"Let's get to business," I interrupted. "What about Traumerei? I thought the Waite crowd owned him."

"So they did till last night when I bought him for the boss. But he'll run on Saturday in Dick Waite's colours."

"Why do you want me to ride him?"

"To put the public off so we can get a decent price. We are running Square Toes, you see, and Chris Keys

will be up. He's sure to open favourite after his second at Sandown yesterday."

"I see. But what about Prince Ophir? He's thrown in at the weights and a good horse."

"Don't you worry about Prince Ophir, laddie. We've fixed it for Traumerei to win, and he can't lose unless you run him off the course."

"You mean that you have squared the jockeys' ring?"

"Not me. I leave such dirty work to outsiders. Len Solomon. You understand?"

"Quite," I answered drily. Len Solomon was a punter-trainer who had earned, deservedly, a reputation for "squaring " jockeys which was almost continental. It was generally believed of him that he could arrange for any horse he wished to win any non-classic race in the calendar. Like many another citizen, I had often wondered why the racing authorities permitted him a continued license to disgrace the turf. Mr. Hilliard seemed to guess my thoughts. "It's all right, Clifford, nobody knows or will ever know that we've had anything to do with him. He's not a chap I like, but you can't bring off a *coup* and choose your tools. Our stable has had a spell of bad luck lately, as you know. A *coup* is wanted badly. The boss was hit over the Spring Meeting, and he's got to get some of it back or shorten hands. He's a clean sport, every inch of him, but he can't afford to run his stable for the public."

"Then Mr. Morland is in this."

"I'm trusting you more than I ought, to tell you so. But you may as well know everything now. The boss is in the banks more than he likes. The drought in the Riverina has brought him right up against the knuckle bone, and he's worrying like the dickens about

his daughter, too. She's just come out from Home engaged to a big swell, an Englishman, and there's talk of settlements. You'll carry a lot of money Saturday, my lad. You'll act on the square I'm sure?"

"I'll win, if that's what you mean, unless the horse falls. Am I permitted to back him, too?"

"Keep your money in your pocket, lad. You'll have the usual fee and fifty pounds to nothing for a win. Satisfied?"

"Amply."

We got afoot and shook hands on the bargain. "It won't be the last," said Mr. Hilliard at the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS MORLAND'S DREAM HORSE.

THE truly devious nature of the Traumerei *coup* was not revealed to me until the very eve of the race, when I went into the jockeys' room to dress. Mr. Hilliard had handed me a grip sack containing the colours that I was to don. When I opened the case it was to receive a surprise. Mr. Waite's colours were pink and yellow stripes with puce cap and purple arm bands; but the colours I found were new to me: chocolate and violet hoops with white sleeves and claret cap. Chris Key sidled up as I put on my boots. "Somebody will be fined for wrong colours to-day, I guess," he remarked with a knowing smirk.

"Well, it's not my fault," I replied. "I've nothing to wear but what they gave me."

"Oh! nobody'll blame you. But crikey! it's playing it low down on the bookies. What?"

"How?" I asked, surprised.

"Don't you spot the game, Tommy?"

"No."

"Blimey, you are innocent. P'raps I better not put you wise."

"Just as you like, Chris," and I turned indifferently away. That fetched him. Chris Key could never bear to keep back anything one assumed not to care to know. "It's this way," he said, "they've fixed you in wrong colours so as to make a pot in the running.

The bookies will naturally be looking for Waite's colours when we all turn into the straight for the run home, and when they don't see 'em in the lead they'll take all the money Traumerei that's offered. It's an old trick, but they's never suspect the Waite crowd of trying it, so they'll sure fall in a treat. Shouldn't wonder if the boss picks up a cool thousand between the turn and the winning post."

"Are you sure of what you say, Chris?" I demanded.

"Sure as I stand here," he replied. "So sure that I'm darned sorry I'm riding, I'd rather be in the betting ring putting all I'm worth on your mount. I've got a bit on, I don't mind telling you, but if I'd dropped to this here development I'd have thrown in for nap or a clean buster. However, it is no use crying for the moon. Come along and be weighed. There's the bell."

I followed him to the scales, feeling ashamed and dispirited. My part had been bad enough before, but I saw it now a mean and down-right swindle. And I had been tricked by the people who were using me—made a blind instrument to fleece the public and the ring. It was too late to refuse the ride, but why should I ride to orders? I had been deceived. Why should I not deceive? It would cast me my job, but I should, on the other hand, recover some self respect. I registered the resolution while striding to Traumerei's box. Yes, better to be ruined than to thrive as a cheat. And I pitied none except myself—certainly not Mr. Hilliard. He had not played the game with me. He was waiting in the paddock with two or three of the Waite people. What an honest man he looked! A wave of passionate resentment seized me as I gazed at him, and sealed my resolution. I would lose the race. Mr. Hilliard gave me a meaning nod, and at

once strode away. They brought out Traumerei and saddled him. I ran my fingers over the girths and listened dumbly to the final instructions of Mr. Waite's trainer, my putative employer of the moment. I was to ride patiently in the ruck into a furlong before the home turn, then go to the front and stay there. I said "yes," and was hoisted into the saddle. The trainer took Traumerei's bridle and led us towards the gate of the enclosure, near which we were stopped by the excited exclamation of a lady. "See, there he is, papa! Number seventeen! Oh! do stop him, papa. I simply must admire him for a moment."

The trainer drew Traumerei to a halt. "Why, certainly, Miss Morland," he said, "admire him to your heart's content. We have plenty of time."

"Oh thank you so much, Mr. Greaves," said the lady. "It's most kind of you. Papa! is he not a beauty? I'm so glad you bought him. I love chestnuts. And how quiet he is! Do you think he'd let me pat his head?"

I glanced from Mr. Morland to the lady. She was young and dressed in shimmering white tulle, with a white feather hat and shoes to match. I was about to conclude her a plain girl with a nice figure, when she raised her eyes to mine. On instant I pulled off my cap, and I knew my cheeks were scarlet. Her eyes were wonderful. I can't describe them, and I am not going to try. Their glances struck right through me as the sunshine penetrates a shadow, and they turned my heart to water, my blood to fire. She gave me a little bow and walked straight up to the horse. Traumerei extended his muzzle to be fondled. "You dear thing," she said, "I'll love you even if you don't win to-day. But you will win, won't you? Because, don't you see, I have backed you, and I am

"You will win on my dream horse to-day, boy," she said, softly.

your new mistress—see?" Then she looked into my eyes again.

"You will win on my dream horse to-day, boy," she said, softly.

I nodded at her stupidly.

"You will," she insisted.

"Yes," I answered.

I cannot remember a single incident of the race. I rode it in a dream. They told me afterwards that Traumerei won by two lengths on the bit. Next day Mr. Hilliard gave me my share of the plunder and I took it. Mr. Morland had won £6,000. Nobody questioned his right. He was a member of the Committee.

CHAPTER IX.

A SONG OF HEINE.

I spent the succeeding year riding and reading. As a rule I was given one mount a week by the Redmount Stable, and Mr. Hilliard also lent me to ride for other stables now and then when a light weight with iron wrists was needed to bring off a "good thing" for the few "top-notch" trainers who generally worked together in the terms of what they called an "honourable understanding." Chris Key continued to be our head jockey, and he rode the Redmount favourites, but I did not envy him. Mr. Hilliard's confidence was given to me, and it was made more valuable in a pecuniary sense than the distinction of superior publicity which was Chris Key's portion. He always rode to win. I, as often as not, rode to lose, by instructions, and I made money both ways. It was a pitiful employment, but profitable, and I was reconciled to it by avarice. Cynicism was my mainstay in those days. Everybody around me seemed to worship money, and to be willing to wade knee-deep in mire to obtain it. Why, then, should I be an exception to my kind?

I had acquired a belief that even the best of men are rogues beneath their skins, and I persuaded myself it was time to cast overboard the last of my ideals. That I did not altogether succeed was due partly to my mother, a being whose mere existence was a constant proof of goodness in the world, and partly to

Miss Morland. Because of these two women I did not become entirely lost to shame. To please the one and to please my indistinct but sweet conception of the other I effected a sort of compromise with my lower self. It was a humorous thing, that compromise. It allowed me to ride "crook" in order to increase my bank account, and it constrained me to devote my leisure hours to innocent and improving pursuits. Thus I would often spend an afternoon helping Mr. Hilliard or some other trainer to loot the public, and spend the same evening reading Heine or Goethe in the original—with my mother's help. She knew the German tongue almost as well as English, having been educated in a Prussian convent, and it gave her pleasure to be my teacher. In all that year I only saw Miss Morland twice. On the first occasion I caught but a glimpse of her as she swept by me in a motor car seated beside her fiancé, the Englishman. His name does not matter. He quarrelled presently with Mr. Morland on the question of settlements, and returned to London a demonstrated fortune hunter. When the scandal of this event trickled to the stable not a hand there but would have forfeited a month's wages for an opportunity to give the titled cad a horse-whipping. It might be supposed that I should have been pleased to learn that Miss Morland was free, but such a thought did not enter my head. It is true that in the first moment I had looked into her eyes there had been planted in my heart the seed of passion. But although the seed germinated and the tree grew, the desire to possess was no part of its fruit. In its early stages my affection for Miss Morland was a reverent and mystical emotion. I knew little of her except that her hair was like the moonlight when it shines in yellow halo through the

tufted edges of a wattle grove in flower, and that her eyes were as blue as the sea, when the sky is cloudless. I did not know her name, and I did not want to know. When she passed me in the motor car she did not see me, but that mattered not at all. I was uplifted and happy all the day, although it rained persistently. The second meeting was a little different. It was on Christmas Eve. I had spent the afternoon absorbing John Stuart Mill's ideas of the place that women ought to occupy in the world, and, after dinner, I took my mother for a quiet saunter towards a favourite vantage spot that overlooked the Dandenongs. Never was there a lovelier night in my remembrance. The moon, almost at the full, was riding high and shining through a fleecy curtain of fine summer clouds. The road was silent and utterly our own. We fell into a chat of poetry and art, and gave each other illustrations now and then in snatches from the works of masters. It was my fortune to declaim a song on Heine as we approached a certain gate. I never completed the recitation. Miss Morland emerged from the shadow of the ivied arch and almost collided with me in the middle of the second stanza. My mother clutched nervously at my arm. The girl stepped back. "Oh! I'm so sorry," she said. I drew off my hat and found that I could speak. "It is wholly my fault, Miss Morland," and I gave her the path. "Who is it?" asked Miss Morland. "I have just come from the electric lights and my eyes are seeing badly.

A bold impulse overcame me. "I rode your dream horse to victory for you a year ago," I answered.

"Did you, indeed? ah! then I know your name—it is Clifford."

My mother squeezed my arm. "This is my mother,

Miss Morland," I said slowly, wondering why she had not gone and did not pass and go. She bowed with charming grace to my mother, and said something I cannot now recall, about the night. I vaguely heard my mother's voice, "The night is for intelligence, for dreams. All creatures sleep it through except those with the power of fancy. The night is mankind's special kingdom, especially a night like this."

Miss Morland smiled, and the moonbeams glinted on her milk-white teeth. "I wish it could be always such a night as this," she said. Then she smiled again, and with a gentle farewell passed us by and took the path to Redmount. We did not speak of her, but when my mother bade me good-night, on our return, I knew instinctively she had divined my secret. Her caress was compassionate and sad. She had no hope for me, and she saw that which I could not see, that some day I would hope.

CHAPTER X.

RUNNING FOR "THE BOOKS."

ON Christmas morning I rode three horses in pace-work exercise, and afterwards took breakfast in the trainer's house. When the meal was over we smoked a pipe together in his garden.

"It is a day of goodwill and good resolutions, Cliff," he said, sedately; "I've made a few this morning. Have you?"

I replied on impulse. "What about never 'taking a hold' of any horse's head again for any reason? Must I quit Redmount?"

He looked me up and down for the better part of two minutes. "Serious?" he asked.

"Oh! I'm only half a moralist," I jeered. "I couldn't have afforded it a year ago, but I've got a nest egg now. Some of it is pretty dirty money, Mr. Hilliard, yet it will buy clean things."

He put his hand upon my shoulder heavily. "D'ye know," said he, "it's been a nasty thought with me for months that I had a hand in making a bad hat of your mother's son. You've pleased me fine by what you've said, my lad."

"Does that mean I'm to keep my job here?"

He shook his head. "There'll always be the young 'uns and riding work if you want it, Cliff; but isn't it time you started on your own? What about getting a license? I'll fix it up for you, and if you always

ride to win you'll not want for mounts. Most stables, you see, are crook some of the time, but none are crook all of the time; and a capable straight jock who can't be bought or bribed to pull a horse could fix his own price, aye, and get it, as soon as the crowd get his measure. You'd have to keep right out of the jockeys' ring though; and that'd mean many a tough journey on the course. Look what they did to young Macintosh in the Spring at Caulfield—toed him out of the saddle and left him with both legs broken at the turn!"

"I'm not frightened of the ring," I said, disdainfully. "Macintosh never should have been put up on Dirk Hartog. He's an honest youngster, no doubt, but as weak as a chicken over a mile, and besides he's blind to half the tricks of the game. I'd like to see them try to toe me out of the saddle."

Mr. Hilliard frowned. "You're 'fly' and keen, and the strongest chap I've ever seen for your weight," he conceded doubtfully, "but it doesn't do to be over confident. They're always inventing new tricks, and as I've told you before this you are much too fond of hugging the rails and sneaking openings in a crowded field and just winning, which is worst of all. More than once you've made me think my money lost when you ought to have had lengths to the good. No grand stand finishes for me. They're too nerve-racking—and they'll dip you right in the mud one day sure, unless you mend your methods. I've got pretty sick of talking to you on that score, I can tell you."

"Aren't you a trifle unjust, Mr. Hilliard? Not once yet have I failed to land your stake."

"What about the Lytton-Lucas dead-heat? If you'd ridden as I wanted Lytton ought to have won by yards."

I shrugged my shoulders. "Has Chris Keys got him into a place since? I assure you I extracted the last ounce out of Lytton that day, and he was lucky to dead-heat. However, it's no use talking, for I know you have made up your mind, and I can't shake it. We must just agree to differ."

"Right, my lad. Differ it is, and say no more about it, leastwise on Christmas Day. Of course you'll stay on with us until you get your license?"

"If you'll have me, gladly. But what of afterwards?"

"That depends upon the boss. But I'll tell you this, Cliff, grandstand finishes or not I want first call on you, so I'm going to advise the boss to give you a retainer. What do you say to £100 a year, and the usual fees for extra services? He'll rise to that I believe, and it will give you a stand-by. I want to do the best I can for you, but I've got to think of the boss, too."

"The retainer would have to be for straight-goers, Mr. Hilliard."

At that he almost lost his temper. "Couldn't you have let that go without saying?" he cried. "D'ye suppose I like crook business? Isn't it just because you've spoken me straight that I'm doing all I can to make the straight path the best course for you to follow?"

I looked him squarely in the eye. "I'll tell you something, too," I said, "it's this: I've seen you fix up some crook things, but I've always felt you loathed the business. I don't believe there's a cleaner-minded man on the turf than yourself."

He nodded by way of thanks, and puffed vigorously at his pipe. "Well, that's arranged," he said at last. "And I'm glad for more reasons than you know or I

ought to tell you. You've been on my conscience, laddie, and I'm blithe to get you off. There's always plenty of boys to take a hold when they're wanted, more's the pity. However, a man hadn't ought to foul his own nest, as the saying is, especially now that the boss is skirting Queer Street again."

"I heard a rumour of that," I murmured. "I had hoped it wasn't true."

Mr. Hilliard waved his hand to indicate Redmount's wide domain. "Looks as substantial as the Bank of England, doesn't it?" he questioned grimly. "Humph!" he went on, "if they only knew, if they only knew. But there, I don't suppose there'd be one guest short at any of his entertainments if they did. Connie Morland is the one I feel for. The boss is a man, and he's had his fun for his money. But that poor girl, just blooming into life, as the saying is: Lord! but it's rough on her."

"Are things very bad?" I ventured.

"Between you and me, Cliff, things are rotten," he responded, earnestly, "and if the boss pulls through it'll be a miracle." He lowered his voice. "I'll have no mount for you on New Year's Day, my lad; not after our talk. You understand?"

"I think I do."

"Think over it and you will. Good day to you, and take a Merry Christmas from me to your mother. One word and the last. Don't back any of our horses on the first. They will be running for——" he hesitated, glancing nervously about him.

"The books?" I whispered.

"To think we should have come to that!" he almost groaned, and he went off, head-bent, to the house.

CHAPTER XI.

A THIEF OF BEAUTY.

LATER on the same day a message came from Mr. Hilliard requesting that I should drop round to the stable in the evening and help him nurse a two-year-old which had been for some time already in the hospital. The youngster had taken a bad turn, and was showing temper. I went, of course, and found the horse so very ill that I consented to spend the night with him, much to Mr. Hilliard's relief, for we had nothing better in the stable, and the trainer feared to lose a possible champion. The vet. was there when I arrived, and when he saw how easily I soothed the youngster's violent fretfulness he assured me that I ought to enter his profession. Mr. Hilliard did all he could to make my vigil comfortable, but it was not a joyous task. I had to record temperatures and change the foments every hour, and as the night wore on it was difficult not to sleep at my post. About one o'clock I became so drowsy that I decided on a stroll in the fresh air. At first I was satisfied to pace the stable grounds, but I soon fell to thinking of Miss Morland and her father's threatened ruin, and the temptation to break bounds overcame me. To look on the house that holds a sleeping lady whom one cherishes in sentiment has been a lure to lovers through the centuries. With quickened heart-beats I abjured

the beaten tracks and stole an entrance into fairy-land.

I would like to describe that pine-girt, moonlit garden if I could; its velvet lawns and its dim sweet-scented orange groves, its laurels and its roses, its open swards star strewn with blossoms, and its shadowed paths and dark, mysterious recesses. I wandered through it like a ghost, breathing in with eagerness the intoxicating perfume of the flowers and other draughts not less disturbing for which I have no name. The loveliness of everything stirred my senses almost terribly. I lost all consciousness of self, and seemed to be another creature, strange and yet familiar, moving like a spirit in the Kingdom of Romance.

It was an enchantment that hardly touched me with surprise, despite its utter unexpectedness, to meet the Princess of the Kingdom face to face. She was standing beside an ivy-mantled dial. Her gown was chequered into leafy patterns by the moonbeams striking through the foliage, but her head and shoulders braved a broader shaft of golden light. Her arms and bosom shone like the white fire of the lesser stars; the edges of her yellow hair were radiantly luminous; her eyes alone were lakes of darkness. She had witnessed my approach unstartled, and when I stood before her stricken into stillness by the vision, she did not change her posture, though I thought to hear her sigh. For a time we gazed at one another. I was breathless, but she always smiled.

"What was your errand?" she inquired at length. "Are you a thief?"

The wine of recklessness raced through my veins. "A thief of beauty," I retorted swiftly. "What right have you to treasure and to measure this alone?"

Her answer pierced my heart. "None," she said,

"why, none at all; you are an agent of the mortgagee, perhaps? No? Well, then, your right here is on a par with mine. I am a trespasser in Redmount—Redmount that I used to call my home. You know, of course. I was the last to know. I only learned to-night. I have been saying good-bye to the garden, Mr. Clifford. You could not guess how fondly I have loved this garden."

Her father had told her of the impending ruin on Christmas night, after the Christmas guests had gone! And she was confiding her troubles to a stable boy! The stable boy could estimate her state of mind, at least—though not his own. What wild words of sympathy did I not pour out to her. What insane assurances of friendship, help and hope! She might have been the daughter of a groom, so little did I think of differences between us, so ardently I wished to be a comfort to her grief. But she was not the daughter of a groom. She soon remembered all that I forgot. One might read her thoughts as she drew her wrappings close, and stepping slowly backwards stared and stared at me as the soul of the stable boy presumptuously revealed itself. She had incurred the revelation by her foolish condescension—her unreticent surrender to her troubles in the sweet relaxing moonlight. She must, therefore, be just and not spurn with a disdain too sharply castigant the outburst she had seemed to court. She had done wrong and must endure the punishment of lightly punishing this leaping servitor. Yet he must be put back in his place. Her dignity demanded that of her. She gave me thanks more chilly than the morning breeze. And with her thanks expressed she left me—frozen by the manner of her words—and passed out queenly from the glade.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COURAGE OF COWARDICE.

THE smashing up of a big fortune is a matter that proceeds with amazing tardiness at times—astonishing even to those who know how rotten is the fabric. Rumours of Mr. Morland's ruin multiplied unceasingly, until the local tradesmen, it was said, declined to leave their wares without prepayment. But the Redmount people held their heads erect, and continued to entertain as lavishly as ever. Not a hand was dismissed from the stables; the stalls were full and wages were paid as usual. No wonder the neighbours did not understand. How could they know of the desperate fight that old "King Dave" was waging in the underworld of money-lenders, trainers, touts and tugs? Of this horse "pulled" at the secret instance of the "pencillers," and that one ridden out to win and winning too, in violation of the principle that honour can reside with thieves? Mr. Morland must have lived a lifetime every day. As his cares pressed his enterprises thickened. He drew money with both hands from a score of tainted sources, and he poured it out as fast. The betting ring had thought to use him—but he wolfed it ruthlessly. Developing a positive genius for wickedness, he played his cards so cleverly that no man dared to take him by the throat.

But the ring met at last, and agreed to bet with him no more. He saved himself from insult by anticipating

their decision and withdrawing from the course. Through Mr. Hilliard he had agents to command, and his betting even rose in scale. Whispers there were of big wins achieved for him in cash by Len Solomon and others, and some of them I knew were true. Always I watched the struggle from my obscurity in tense anxiety. With all my heart I pitied the man, and wanted him to win out, however wickedly he worked. There actually came a period when it seemed he might succeed. Fed constantly with sops, the hunger of his creditors was soothed and they became less exigent.

I heard of a meeting convened to consider the question of his bankruptcy, in which the clamour of the more exacting was over-ruled. But they drove hard bargains with the entangled victim none the less, and Mr. Morland was compelled to promise heavy interest for the accommodation. The breathing space, however, enabled him to lay hands on ready money, and I guessed what he would do with it. Every shilling would be staked covertly on some big race, and he would sink or swim by the result. The March Meeting at Flemington would provide him with the chance.

Mr. Hilliard aged in those three months. He was Mr. Morland's confident and the keeper of his master's financial conscience. But Mr. Morland showed no sign of wear. He always had a pleasant word for his dependants, and he walked with the easy carriage of a mind at ease. The stable idolised him for his courage, guessing what it must have cost him to maintain so bold a front. My license was issued in January, and my official connection with Redmont ceased. I continued, however, to do riding work for Mr. Hilliard and I saw him daily. Early in February the betting lists began to disclose Mr. Morland's hand. He had three horses entered for the Newmarket Handi-

cap, Traumerei, Desert King and Old Gold. On the first of the month all were quoted at long prices. but by the seventh Old Gold had firmed to tens. A week later he shortened to sixes and by the twenty-first he was three to one in a field of thirty. Evidently somebody had risked a fortune on the horse. We had no reason to ask each other who? Mr. Morland came every morning to the tracks to see Old Gold gallop. In the opinion of us all he was just the horse for a Newmarket, and he had already twice won over the straight six furlongs, albeit eight months earlier. My only doubt of him concerned his form. True enough, he looked trained to the hour, and he galloped on the tracks like a machine, but he had not been out in public for more than half a year, and I counted that a detriment, although I expected him to win. Chris Key was to ride him, of course. Yet I was not neglected. No other stable having offered me an engagement up to a week before the race, Mr. Hilliard decided to start one of the other two, Traumerei and Desert King as well as Old Gold, and to put me up.

The only question was which of the two should be scratched? We settled it by a trial between them on the sand at Caulfield. I rode the dream horse, Chris Key Desert King. Traumerei won by a neck in 1.19¼, a poor performance. Desert King was scratched the same day. Two mornings later Traumerei did the six furlongs on the same track in the same time, but with so much in hand that I asked Mr. Hilliard to put five pounds on the old fellow for me at the longest price he could get. That evening he got me £500 to £5. and I became the laughing-stock of the stable.

I was the first jockey to leave the paddock for the big sprint. Nobody took any notice of the dream horse—not even the lady for whom he had won a race so long

ago. I saw her as I rode towards the track gate, standing with a group of worshippers about the favourite. She was dressed like a princess of dollars, and all around her were kings and queens. For the preliminary canter I walked Traumerei a furlong past the judges' post, curiously eyeing the vast concourse of people on the stand and lawns as I proceeded. Turning there I galloped down the straight at three parts pace, and all the while I wondered if we had not all made a mistake. Traumerei was running like a clock and carrying his 14 lbs. of dead weigh like a giant. What if he should beat the favourite? I tried to put the fancy by and walked down the straight again and did not return. I did not draw rein, indeed, until we reached the "straight six" starting post. There arrived I gave Traumerei his head and let him nibble at the grass while we waited our competitors. He was as quiet as an old sheep, but I was terribly excited. I felt it in my bones that Traumerei might win £500 for me and ruin Mr. Morland. I felt an old man before the barrier was lowered.

There was hardly any delay at the post, we all had so much room. That is the best and the worst of the straight six. It obviates crowding and gives every horse a precisely equal chance, with no opportunity for "pocketing" or other tactics of the jockeys' ring. Traumerei behaved like the veteran he was. He walked up to his place, the very centre of the field, and crouched, like a cat about to spring. He had leaped away before my slower eyes had caught the upward movement of the wires. I never saw another horse from that instant till we passed the box. It was because I did not look behind me. Traumerei snatched a lead of two lengths as we left the barrier, and he kept it all the way. I rode him a slashing finish, I

believe. I must have done so because of the weariness I felt as I stepped on the scales to weigh in, my first moment of clear consciousness. "Right weight," said a voice. Then my hands were wrung excessively by perfect strangers, and I was hustled into a room where reporters talked to me and tried to make me talk. All I could say was "What came second?"

"Why, Old Gold!" they roared in chorus, "with Sentinel third."

As soon as I could possibly contrive I tore off the colours, donned my clothes and sneaked from the dressing-room into one of the inner passages. Watching my chance I made a bolt presently into the members' enclosure and thence into the public betting paddock. My one thought was to avoid Mr. Morland. In twenty seconds I was lost in the crowd upon the lawn. Through this I threaded swiftly, making for the gates. There would be no more mounts for me that day. With a sigh of relief I turned the corner of the big stand and made hot foot for the railway exit, only to be halted of a sudden by her mention of my name. She was seated in a motor car alone. Her eyes commanded me to approach, smiling all the time. I was drawn like a needle to the magnet. "Have you seen my father, Mr. Clifford?" she demanded.

"No, Miss Morland."

"Mr. Hilliard?"

"No."

"Ah! I was right, then," she said quietly. "Don't let me detain you, sir."

"It was the dream horse," I stammered miserably. "I'd rather have died than ridden him. None of us thought he had a chance against Old Gold."

"Except yourself," she corrected with the sweetest of smiles. "How clever of you, Mr. Clifford. You

have won quite a large sum, I am told. Is that why you are running away?"

"Yes."

"Well, you have the courage of your cowardice at least," she said in German.

I answered her in the same tongue. "Do you think I ought to drown myself, or is that not a sufficiently disgraceful death?" Her reply astounded me. "You are suffering," she said, softly, "I can see it in your eyes. But can your suffering compare with mine? Think of me to-night trying to accomplish the impossible, to heal my father's wounds with words; yet I do not talk of death. It's useful to know German, is it not? Good-bye, Mr. Clifford. Here comes my father, as usual with a host of friends. We are to have a gay supper this evening. Sleep well!"

I bowed mechanically and hurried away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TIP OF A SATIN SHOE.

THE bells were tolling midnight as I entered the grounds of Redmount Hall. I went to the dial glade and waited there until the last of the motor cars had taken away the last guest. "Father and daughter will be conferring now," I thought and I flung myself face downwards on the soft lush grass and gnawed my hands to keep from groaning at the pity of it all. Long afterwards something touched me on the shoulder. It was the tip of a satin shoe. A second and I was facing her, dazed a little by her unexpected coming and the elfin brightness of the waning room. "Sleep well, I said—but not here," she murmured with a sombre smile.

"How shall I ever sleep again?" I cried. "I would have given my life to help, and I have been an instrument of ruin."

"Come, come," she said, "your despair is premature. My father has explained that things are better than they seem. Everybody supposes him the successful author of a raid upon the betting ring. It is believed he made Old Gold favourite in order to win a larger sum by backing Traumerei."

"Traumerei," I stammered, "Traumerei was a rank outsider. Nobody backed him at all."

"Wrong again," smiled Miss Morland. "At the last moment somebody backed him heavily, and he started at a short price. Who did it we do not know, but it does not matter, because the world insists and will insist it was my father. The world is so very wise, you know."

The irony of her tone shocked as much as her words surprised me.

"It was not I," I said. "You can't think that. How cynical you are! I thought you——"

"Of what value are your thoughts?—the thoughts of a jockey?"

"Where is Mr. Morland?"

"What is that to you? He is asleep, perhaps. Amuse me! I do not want to talk of racing any more. I do not want to think. Who taught you to speak German? Why did you recite the poem of the pine tree and the palm tree to your mother, that night on Burnham Road? You are a peculiar jockey, Mr. Clifford. I think those verses are among the saddest and the sweetest ever penned. Don't you?"

"I am a worshipper of Heine," I replied, as quietly as I could. "My mother taught me German, Miss Morland. Once upon a time she was a fashionable lady like you; my father, like yours, was fond of horses. He died a pauper."

She shuddered visibly. "A goose is walking on my grave," she said, "but you will mend your family's fortune, will you not?"

"If I can."

"You can. You have success engraved upon that hawklike nose of yours—and on that stubborn chin. Will you remember when I am in the underworld?"

"Remember what?"

"That I foretold your fortune, at midnight, by this dial, like a witch."

"I shall never forget one syllable that you have said to me, Miss Morland."

"What a memory! But you are not amusing me at all. You are lugubrious, your voice, at least. I cannot see your eyes."

"How shall I amuse you?"

"How can I tell? You ought to be inspired. You are alone at midnight with——"

"With the lady I adore." I said in under-breath. "But she regards me as an animated clod and adorns me with some scrip-scraps of her confidence because she considers me contemptible. In the same fashion a man will tell his troubles to a dog. It is not necessary to wear armour against a creature you despise."

The girl had been leaning on the dial. She drew herself erect, and searched my face.

"No," she answered, slowly. You are wrong to think that I despise you, Mr. Clifford. I never did, I think."

"You are growing gracious. Be careful, Miss Morland; I am a jockey still."

"Will you always be?"

"It was the question of a flirt," I cried, accusingly. "Are you a coquette? I have the right to ask. What matters it to you what I am or will be now or ever?"

The challenge stung her to retort in kind.

"Nothing," she answered coldly, "just nothing at all. I was curious. You have been impertinent, so we are quits. Now, will you be good enough to leave

me, Mr. Clifford? I am tired of your conversation and—of you. They say there is a proper place for everything and everyone. Yours, I think, is not here."

I drew back, stricken dumb by her cutting words, giving her the path. With leisurely composure she gathered up her skirts and went away, disdaining to waste on me another glance.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON HIS FEET AGAIN.

ALTHOUGH the wrong horse won the Newmarket, the event proved of service to Mr. Morland. Most people found it easier to believe he had worked a trick on the public with Traumerei than that he had honestly backed the favourite, Old Gold. As a fact he lost heavily over the race; and the prize, although a large one, did not recoup him; but his moral reputation was the only sufferer. The public estimated his profits from the supposed *coup* at from £30,000 to £50,000, and hardly a soul believed he had won less than £20,000. It was then I discovered how essentially financial credit depends on popular opinion; as if by enchantment the owner of Redmount seemed to have swum out of his difficulties. He improved the opportunity like a master. He called a meeting of his creditors, and informed them that he proposed to apply all the ready money at his disposal to re-stocking his stations. The mortgagees were beguiled. They agreed to extend the terms of repayment for a twelve-month, and they did not require any precise guarantee as to the amount of re-stocking that he was to undertake. The news of the transaction spread like wildfire through the city. "Morland is on his feet again," said everybody. Mr. Morland had never been poorer in his life; but then, nobody knew it and that made all the difference.

There was, however, one cloud in the sky. A man who is supposed to have just made an enormous *coup* cannot find a plausible excuse to borrow money. Mr. Morland had contrived to enlarge his breathing space, but how to turn it to real profit without capital? That was his problem. He solved it by another reference to the stable. A few weeks after the Newmarket he started Traumerei and Old Gold again in one race at Sandown Park. It was a curious race. The bookmakers and the public were both nonplussed—which horse was intended by the stable to win? Mr. Hilliard ostentatiously backed Old Gold for a large stake at a short price. Traumerei promptly lengthened. On instant, Len Solomon and his crowd began to back Traumerei. Like magic Old Gold drifted in the betting, and ten minutes before the start he was at eight to one and Traumerei was a hot favourite at six to four on. Yet at the death-knock Old Gold was the favourite!

I rode Old Gold that day, and my orders were to win. I beat Traumerei by half a length. Mr. Hilliard that evening collected £2,600 in notes and gold from the tugs he had employed to bet in cash, and he subsequently transferred the amount to Mr. Morland, plus another £2,000 he had won himself from the books. That was the last race I rode for the Redmount Stable. On the following day the newspapers announced that Mr. Morland had decided to retire from the turf and to devote himself to sheep breeding in the Riverina. A week later all his horses in training were brought to the hammer, and Mr. Morland and his daughter set out for Terranora—his station on the Murrumbidgee. I was on the platform when their train started, but I only saw them from afar. Me, they did not see.

CHAPTER XV.

A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN.

DURING the next eight months I rode sixteen winners and secured twenty-three minor places for various owners. Many jockeys could show a better record, still I had no reason to be discontented. The better class of trainers showed an increasing disposition to employ me, largely because it was known I had excluded myself from the jockeys' ring, and they offered me more regular riding track work, than I could do. I was consequently enabled to treat payments received for riding in races as profits; and as I never bet except on my own mounts, my bank-book showed me a credit balance of £680 at the commencement of the spring season, and this, after having established my mother in a decent little villa at South Yarra, facing the Domain. Neither of us regretted leaving Caulfield. We had no friends to part from except the O'Briens and Dr. Ducie, and they are my friends still.

The Spring Meeting passed without sensations. I rode in each of the big Cups, but my mounts finished in the ruck. However, I pulled off the Veteran Stakes with Savoyard for Mr. Hilliard and won £400 for myself on the event; and a week later I rode the same horse to victory at Sandown Park and netted

another £600. I went home that evening full of elation, intending to propose to my mother a trip to England, a thing I had long been planning and which I could at length afford. I found her seated in the sitting room with some fancy work upon her lap, a strange fixed smile upon her sweet old face. She was dead. The doctors said she had died without a pang. Her heart had mysteriously and suddenly failed. Days afterwards I found a letter in her escritoire addressed to me, which proved that she had long expected such an end. In this letter she implored her "adored son" not to grieve. I shut up the cottage and took train to Echuca. Crossing the river to Moama I bought a saddle hack and pack horse and set out into the Riverina. My purpose was to make for "Terranora," Mr. Morland's station on the Wolaroi, a tributary of the Murrumbidgee River, across country from the south. I could have shortened the journey by travelling by rail to Gundagai, but I felt an imperative need to hide myself from the eyes of mankind. I was not fit for human company just then.

When my mother died my plan of life was shattered. The mainspring of my activities was broken. There was no longer anyone to strive or work for.

I entered the wilderness vaguely bent on the quest of such comfort as a wounded child might seek, by hiding in a corner. The journey was long and tedious. For six days I saw no human being. The sun was my guide by day; by night the Southern Cross. I ate scarcely at all; I did not spare my horses. Often, in fits of gloomy meditation, I wandered widely from the way. On the seventh day, at noon, I met a bearded stockman, who stopped and eyed me strangely as I came. For a moment or two we sat our horses,

silently at gaze. Then he said: "You look pretty sick, mate. Going far?"

"To 'Terranora,'" I answered, with an effort.

"It's over there," he pointed with his whip. "You'll make it by sundown if your cattle hold out."

I nodded thanks at him, and presently he rode off, suppressing like a true bushman any further expression of curiosity or interest in my concerns.

The sun was still an hour from the horizon when the roofs of "Terranora" rose in view. The homestead was a sprawling cottage built of wood, square, squat and ugly. Two great box-trees shaded the front, but there was no sign of a garden. The Wolaroi Creek wound its devious way some half mile from the habitations. It was thickly fringed with evergreens, but the plain was sparsely timbered, and even in the paddocks trees were few and far between. About two hundred yards from the homestead there was a cluster of small cots and humpies, stables, barns and outhouses, arranged without any symptom of design. From the hillock on which I had pulled up I surveyed the station and its environs and wondered how Mr. Morland and his daughter could live there. The whole place seemed untended and unkempt. There were three large hayricks near the stables, but not one of them was thatched. A field of maize shouldered some rising ground on the west; and a paddock of lucerne dipped into an angle of the river flats. Other cultivation there was none. I counted about thirty horses, brood mares, in the paddocks, and far to the north a few straggling sheep. Not a human creature was in sight. Immediately beneath me was a rut-filled road leading to the station. I took it,

dreamily, and passing through some disreputable gates, arrived ten minutes later at the first big shed. Three men were seated at a plank table within, munching rations and drinking tea. A sharp featured woman appeared at once at the door, accosting me with the words: "We've no time for sundowners, mister. You've come to the wrong place." One of the men, however, pushed past her with a growl, "Sundowners don't have packhorses, you chump!" and confronted me. "Come from Tomandick?" he demanded. "How's the country over there? Did you catch the shower we got Friday?"

"No," I answered stupidly.

"Dry! Thought so. Tomandick's always too late for the western showers. We can give her sixty points in the year any day of the week. Get off your horse, matey, and have a bite and sup. You look knocked up. I'll fix your cattle."

I obeyed and entered the dilapidated shed. The woman pointed me a place at table and set a plate of beef before me. One of the men pushed across a tin pot of ink black tea. "Milk?" he asked, and drenched the brew. "Sugar?" he shovelled a spoonful of brown crystals into the pot. I could not eat, but I drank thirstily cup after cup of the strong sweet fluid. Many questions were put to me which I could not answer. This seemed so funny that I laughed. I laughed quite easily, but once having started laughing it was difficult to stop. The men glanced at each other questioningly. The woman, however, put her arm around my quaking shoulders and revenged herself on the man who had earlier named her fool. He and the others were born idiots, it appeared; otherwise they must have recognised that the "pore lamb" was only

a slip of a boy, and he was dying under their eyes. He wanted to be put to bed, "poor lamb," and "mothered."

The word struck into my brain with the vividness of a flash of lightning, revealing—desolation. I knew no more for many days.

CHAPTER XVI.

WOLAROI.

WITH consciousness came curiosity. I was lying in a small room with a roof that sloped steeply in one direction. The walls were rough hewn slabs, with many chinks admitting light and air. There was no window, but one wide open door through which I saw a line of willows beyond a triple row of dog leg fences. Evidently my habitation was a "lean-to" piled against one of the living cottages. I was still speculating when a figure in the doorway blotted out the sun. It was the woman who had called me "pore lamb." "So you're awake at last," she said. "And not raving. Sure, he's a wonder, that young doctor. But don't tell me you're hungry, the broth ain't half cooked yet. What's your name?"

"Counsel," I answered weakly.

"Mine's Mrs. Blake. Joe Blake's my man. He's stud groom to what is left of 'Terranora.' There's your clothes on them nails. We searched your pockets to try and find out who you are in case you kicked the bucket. But we didn't touch your money. My, but you're quite rich, my dear. I hope you came by them bank notes honestly. You'll owe the doctor for three visits. You've been mighty bad, but you'll soon pull up. I've nursed you all I know how. What's your Christen name?"

"Clifford, m'am."

"I knew a Clifford once in Blayney; but I'll fetch your broth. The doctor said you was to be fed up as soon as you stopped being balmy. You're just skin and bone. Where do you come from?"

"Melbourne."

"I've got a sister there. She married a farrier, but I ain't heard from her for years. What are you by trade, my dear?"

"A jockey."

"Joe's right, then. He guessed it in one, but I said you was too tall. I never see a slimmer lad. How old are you?"

"Twenty-five."

"Lordy! I'd a sworn you wasn't more'n eighteen. That broth oughter be done by now. Got any brothers or sisters?"

"No."

"Pore lamb. I know your mother's dead. You raved about her horrible. You must be a horfin, I suppose. I feel for you, true. You can stay here as long as you like, my dear, and no charge. We're Christian folk, Blake and me, even if we've got no use for sundowners. They're the plague of my life, them sundowners. I suppose you won that money at the races, ay?"

"Yes."

"Wish I had the chance. Never mind, it'll come some day. Blake's got a colt here—but there, I mustn't gabble. You're looking ghastly white."

The broth was brought, and it so marvellously strengthened me that I was able to thank my nurse. Then came a long deep sleep. Awaking on another day I found Mrs. Blake again beside me with a fresh pot of broth and some eggs beaten up in milk. All the while I ate she talked volubly, searching me with

swift and unexpected questions. Later on her husband entered. He spent an hour, talking horse and drought. I gathered that the drought had broken some time before, but that the station was suffering its ill effects and needed re-stocking. He took a gloomy view of the prospects, and spoke in pitiful terms of Mr. Morland.

"Poor old cove," said Mr. Blake, "he's only managing for the banks these days, and he wouldn't even be let do that if they could get a buyer for the place. And he used to be the king of the Riverina once."

"Has he any of his family with him?" I contrived to ask.

"He's got no family, except Miss Connie," replied my host. "She's his housekeeper, with only my gal, Delia, to help. And she's a lady, too, every inch of her. You'd oughter know that, my lad. She sent to get the doctor when you was balmy, and the bed you're lying on belongs to her. She sent it from the homestead, sheets and pillows and all."

"She did not see me—while I was delirious?"

"Oh, didn't she!" scoffed Mr. Blake with heavy sarcasm. "Oh no, of course not. And she didn't sit up with Jemima three solid nights putting cold bandages on your head. Not that there's anything wonderful in that, though. She's the sort that'd do the same for a sick steer."

"I believe I have seen her in Melbourne," I muttered. "Did not Mr. Morland—— Is he not the man who used to own Redmount Stable?"

"Redmount was his place in Melbourne. It went to the hammer, though, a bit ago. He was one of the biggest guns on the turf. P'raps you may have rode for him, seeing as you're a jockey. Did you?"

"I believe I have ridden some of his horses. Didn't he have a gelding called Desert King?"

"Of course he did. Came second in the Maribyrnong two years ago. Was you in the saddle?"

"No, but I rode him in another race."

"Just fancy that. I must tell the boss—but no, I better not. He don't like anyone to mention racing to him now. No wonder, either, poor old cove! Well, so long, sonny. I'll see you again later. Don't be afraid to let the missus know if you want anything."

Clearly Miss Morland had not recognised in the sick waif she had befriended the insolent servant who had once dared to clasp her in his arms. For hours I thought of her and wondered. Had I altered so terribly? Or was it that she had never paid me the small compliment of pressing my features on her mind? The mirror did something to explain the bitter little riddle. My face was incredibly old and haggard. My hair was long and streaked with grey. There was a thick growth of stubble on my chin and cheeks. I required to look closely to recognise myself. During the long night I made some strides towards acquaintanceship with the new Clifford Counsel. Undoubtedly I had become another man. I looked back upon the past with sad indifference; I looked forward to the future without hope and without fear. For the present I determined to build up my health as rapidly as possible When quite recovered I would unobtrusively depart, taking care not to see Miss Morland, because the sight of her might conceivably provoke in my dull mind uneasiness, although I fancied not. By the fourth day of my convalescence I was able to sit up. I forced my cure in order to escape the irritating garrulity of Mrs. Blake. I could not take to the woman, despite her unfailing kindness, for some

reason. She ceaselessly annoyed and rubbed be up the wrong way with her piercing questions and her shrewdly impertinent inquisitiveness.

Blake was much easier to get on with. His conversation pertained exclusively to horses, on which subject he was an expert, and therefore interesting. We held long debates on equine characteristics, the breaking in of thoroughbreds, and we soon became companions—almost friends. On the sixth day I was able to use my legs a little. As soon as I was dressed Blake lent me his arm and led me to the stable.

"I've been keeping from talking about a good sort of colt I've got," he said, as we started, "so as to give you a bit of a surprise. I had him put in that there shed. You'll like him, I guess."

"Thoroughbred?" I asked.

"By Minter out of Sayce. Galopin blood on both sides, you see. I'm rather building on this here colt."

"Named him yet?"

"Wolaroi. I called him after the creek yonder. He was foaled on the bank."

"How old is he?"

"Well, I call him a colt, but he's a bit over five, to tell you the truth. But he's a colt to look at, anyway. You see he wasn't broke till he was over four. He got away from us as a two-year-old and ran with the brumbies on the ranges till this time last year; when we grafted him in a round up, quite by chance. I broke him in myself. He's a bit of a devil, I promise you."

"Temper?"

"He chewed the arm nigh off Jim O'Carrol a bit ago, and cost me six months' savings. H—, but he's a man-eater, and he fights with his forefeet like a boxing kangaroo. That's my trouble, Mr. Counsel.

I'd have entered him for last Sydney Cup if I could have got him gentle enough for a boy to ride, but the boss won't hear of gelding him."

"Sydney Cup! Eh! You fly at high game. Do you take him for a champion?"

Blake stopped, and said, impressively, glancing apprehensively around him ere he spoke. (By the way, why is it that no racing man will ever impart a confidence about a horse without taking the most ridiculous precautions against eavedroppers?) "Look here, my lad, I don't think Wolaroi's a champion. He *is* a champion. What weight do you think I ride?"

I glanced at him and hazarded a guess: "Eleven two."

"Wrong," he said. "I can weigh in at ten six. Well, that colt has carried me two miles in 3.40, and he's done it more'n once. I tell you he's uncommon."

Blake chuckled to see my interest and led me to the stall. Standing before the half-door I leaned upon the edge and peered within. From the shadows of the box a wicked-looking face confronted me, the face of a big coal-black stallion. A nose bridle, fastened by steel chains to posts on either side, held him imprisoned. The instant he caught sight of us he flattened his ears and craned forth his neck; baring his formidable teeth like a carnivorous wild animal. "Just a pleasant little way he's got," said Mr. Blake. "Always likes to say 'how d'ye do' to visitors, don't you, my beauty?" Pressing me aside, Blake entered the box. Wolaroi snorted and fell back on his haunches, trying in the act to rise; but the chains were taut, and rear he could not, though he strove to do so with a fury that was daunting to my enfeebled nerves. "Look out!" I cried involuntarily. Blake laughed. "I put them posts in myself," he said. Then he addressed

Wolaroi in a stream of the foulest curses it has ever been my lot to overhear, and stepping to the side rails he kicked the horse savagely and repeatedly in the ribs. "I'll teach you to show temper to me, you ——," he concluded, hoarsely. I departed: and so strong was my disgust that it gave me strength to return unassisted to my little hospital. Blake followed in silence, struggling to regain his self control, I think. I threw myself upon the bed and closed my eyes. He stood in the doorway for several minutes, dumb as a stone. But at length he spoke. "I s'pose you think I ain't fit to own a horse," he muttered, angrily. "Well, p'raps I ain't. I've got a nasty temper when I'm roused. But I'll say this for myself—it ain't once in a blue moon I'd ever do a thing like that. You can think what you like, but I never kicked a horse before. But that devil's got me beat, and when he went to fight me just now I went off the handle. You see I've tried him all ways. I've stuffed him and I've starved him and I've been as kind as a mother to him; but it's all one. He's wicked through and through. Strike me, but I've a good mind to feed him to the crows."

I sat up in the bed and stared at him. "You and Mrs. Blake have been very kind to me," I said, "so I won't say what I think. But I can't see a horse kicked, I can't. It makes me sick. Name a price for Wolaroi and I'll buy him from you."

His eyes narrowed, and he assumed a cunning look. "He's only half mine. He half belongs to the boss."

"I want your half—the half you kicked."

"Do you, now; well it'll cost you a bit, sonny," he said with angry irony. "I wouldn't take a penny under three hundred quid for my interest in Wolaroi."

"Yet, you'd feed him to the crows! Fetch me pen and ink and I'll write you a cheque."

"You're gammoning, ain't you?"

"I was never more serious."

He hurried away. I heard a lot of whispering inside the cottage, and I guessed its purport. Presently Blake returned, and I was sure. He was doubtful whether my cheque would be honoured, and he insisted that I should remain at Terranora until he knew. I agreed at once. He then objected that I could not exercise any rights over the horse without arranging with Mr. Morland for the disposition of the latter's half interest. "Be sure I'm not a thief," I cried. "I don't want the horse. I don't like him. But he's a living creature—a horse. I'm wasting £300 to insure him from your damnable ill-usage. What becomes of him is no concern of yours, I'll fix that up with Mr. Morland. Here is your cheque."

He took it and eyed the paper sheepishly from every point of view. "You won't tell the boss—about—about—"

"No," I said.

He slunk out of the lean-to, and I saw him no more for four-and-twenty hours. That is how I became part owner of the famous Wolaroi.

CHAPTER XVII.

TAMING AN OUTLAW.

THE more I progressed the heavier time hung upon my hands. In all the living quarters of the station-hands there was not a single book; and no newspapers except some tattered copies of the Sydney "Bulletin." They were not a very literate crowd, those men. They passed their days in hard work, their evenings at cards; playing interminable games of euchre, smoking black tobacco, and drinking enormous quantities of tea. Four days of their company reduced me to a state bordering on imbecility. On the fifth I became desperate, and resolved to undertake the education of Wolaroi. Blake broke into jeering laughter when I told him. That such a whipper-snapper should have the cheek to attempt a task that had beaten him was too absurd. The hands agreed with Blake, and united to pour ridicule on me. I persisted, nevertheless, and after some trouble my orders were carried out. Wolaroi was taken to the box where I had first seen him, and secured in the position he occupied when Blake had kicked him and thus caused me to become his owner. This done, I sent the hands about their business, and spent the morning speaking to Wolaroi in soothing tones, accustoming him to the sound of my voice. I did not enter the stable, but sat in the doorway on a camp stool, talking almost continuously to him, reasoning with him, just as though he were a

naughty child. I confess I made no perceptible progress. Now and then he would relax his wicked attitude and seem comparatively at ease; but I had only to move a hand to set him plunging against his bridle and otherwise behaving like a lunatic. I had taken on a big job. The horse, obviously, feared and hated every human biped. But he did not object to dogs or fowls. Once an old sheep dog trotted by me into the box and began to unearth a bone under the manger. Wolaroi took no notice of him whatever. Several fowls also impudently intruded at times, but Wolaroi endured their visits with indifference. It was man that he feared and hated—man only. I must teach him that he need neither fear nor hate one man at least. After the mid-day meal I begged some apples of Mrs. Blake and I returned to the box, carrying also a bucket of cool rain-water. It was a burning day, and I hoped the horse would be thirsty. When I offered him the apples he made a frantic effort to savage me. When I offered him the water he thrust out both forefeet, despite his cramped posture, and the result was a sprawling roll, which must have nearly broken his neck. When he got up he was in a perfect lather, and he frothed blood at the mouth. I talked to him gently most of the afternoon, and twice again offered him the water and the apples, but without success. He would have eaten and drunk had I left him alone; but I had no mind to do that. My plan was to win him by the gradual compulsion of hunger and thirst, combined with unremitting kindness, to accept food and drink from my hands. The day closed on failure absolute.

Next morning I was in the box at daylight. I had left the bucket and the apples overnight within his sight, but without his reach. A glance at the

The moment I appeared he darted at me open-mouthed.

Wolarol's Cup. *Page 99.*

hoof-scooped hollows in the floor testified to the efforts he had made to get at the water during the night. His flanks were distended and his nostrils were inflamed and dry. He was as wicked as ever, but some of the fire of him had gone out. I spoke to him tenderly for several minutes, then gently offered him the bucket .Inadvertently I went too close to him. He all but snapped my shoulder, and his hot breath hit me in the face like a puff from a bellows.

After breakfast I returned to the charge, but he rested unsubdued. Luncheon time arrived, and by then my throat was sore with speaking. I rested abed for the three hottest hours of the day, and at four o'clock repaired once more to the box. Wolaroi by some marvellous effort had broken both his tethering chains. He had drunk the water and was munching the last of the apples. Luckily I had bolted the half door; for the moment I appeared he darted at me open-mouthed. I fell back in amazement, and for a moment we gazed at one another—or rather I gazed into his ravenous jaws, for his wicked eyes were rolled back in their sockets. Suddenly the humour of the situation struck me, and I laughed out heartily —the first time in many weeks.

"Well, old man," I said at last, "the first round goes to you, I own up freely. You've done me brown; but it's only the first round. Don't forget that!" Then something arrested my attention. It was the fact that Wolaroi had closed his mouth, had depressed his muzzle and was staring at me with eyes that did not roll, nor show the whites. "Fool that I am!" I muttered, "I ought to have laughed before!" It was easy to laugh again. Slowly, steadily I approached him inch by inch, sometimes laughing, sometimes talking in a wheedling and cajol-

ing manner, as mothers talk to babes. The horse snorted and drew back, but he did not try to savage, though he always faced me. At length I reached the door. He made to rear and once more bared his teeth as I laid my arms upon the edge, but he did not charge. I laughed at the psychological instant. The sound disconcerted his intention. He stood at bay, ready to fight me in a second, but—he did not charge. Keeping my posture movelessly, I continued softly to address him until my body ached and every muscle quivered from the strain. All the while my brain was asking questions—will he beat me? shall I win? The answer came at last. Such a quaint answer. Wolaroi turned his back and devoted his subdued attention to the empty manger. I began to rub my cramped arms. A little later I opened the door, laughing softly, not only for protection, but to conceal terror, for in truth I was afraid. Wolaroi trembled like an aspen, but he did no more than partially turn his head to watch me from the corners of his eyes. I took up the bucket, and by dint of a great effort of will power I did not hurry out of the box. Fifty paces off I stopped and looked back. Wolaroi had his head over the locked half-door and was watching me sedately, just like an ordinary horse. I left him to starve that night. The second round was mine.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FRIENDS AT LAST.

HE was so famished by the morning that he whinnied when he saw me coming. I carried a brimming bucket to the half door and held it up to him. He drew back and stood wickedly at bay. I eased the bucket on one knee and spoke to him commandingly. He swung round and fretfully began to pace the stall. During the hour he made four desperate attempts to overcome his nervous dread of me, but only once did he get his nose within a foot of the water, and each time he retired he dashed himself in futile rage against the walls of the box. I was disappointed, but not discouraged. The horse was still behaving like a maniac —but with this difference, he no longer seemed to want to fight me. Not once had he offered to attack me; he was only hurting and fighting himself. After an interval of three hours I approached him again. On this occasion he was in a new mood. He had withdrawn to the farthest wall of the box, and there he stood hanging his head in an atitude of sullen dejection. I called to him and splashed the water, but, although he quivered, he would neither lift his head nor move. I closed the upper half door and left him in darkness to think things over for the rest of the day.

A little before sunset I paid him my third visit, carrying, as well as the water, an armful of green

lucerne. As the top of the door swung wide he whinnied faintly, and came slowly forward, breathing in a series of painful snorts.

"Had enough of it, old man?" I asked. "Come along. Don't be a fool any more. Nobody's going to eat you."

He craned forth his neck and gazed at me in a shrinking agony of fear. I stood as still as a granite image, but coaxed him in a whisper all the while. Gradually his tense muscles relaxed. He had put his head into the trap and nothing had snapped upon him. He drew slowly back, then tried again with a shade more confidence.

"I suppose the last man you made such an experiment with gave you a clubbing on that beautiful black muzzle, eh?" I said. "But all men are not brutes, old fellow. Try again!"

The next time he tried the water drew him like an all-compelling magnet. The muzzle sank slowly, slowly, inch by inch, until at length his hot breath fanned the water. There came a weird shrill sob, and the nose plunged deep into the fluid. Once more the head flung upward, and a wild snort drenched my face with spray. I did not move. The eyes rolled, then grew still, fixed in a charmed gaze on the bucket. Again he lowered his head, and this time did not raise it till not a drop remained. At once he sprang away, refreshed and elfishly elusive. I refilled the bucket and returned. Wolaroi stared at me for several seconds, deep within the box.

"Come on," I said, "you must be thirsty yet."

He approached and drank immediately, with but few signs of trepidation. I fetched him a third bucket and he drained that. "Now to eat," I cried, and offered him the lucerne. He snatched

a mouthful and plunged backward, but returned to snatch another when the first was swallowed. Thus until all was gone. I slept happily that night. Next morning Wolaroi was very nearly as wild as on the first day. I locked both doors and left him without food or water for four and twenty hours. It was the end of the contest. On the fourth morning he acknowledged me his master by permitting me to stroke his ears while he ate and drank my offerings. All the station-hands watched the marvel from Mrs. Blake's verandah, a hundred yards away. They saluted me with three cheers as I went to breakfast. But Blake was glum and silent. I had won where he had failed. I spent the next two days and nights almost continuously in Wolaroi's box, teaching him the tricks of fondling hands. By the end of that time I could crawl all over him and creep between his legs without as much as causing him to flatten his ears. We were friends.

CHAPTER XIX.

MY FIRST APPOINTMENT WITH A WOMAN.

FOR ten days I had been engrossed with a single idea, and I had not thought of anything beyond. But a morning dawned when I realised that my work was done. My health was re-established. My strength had returned. My saddle hack and pack horse were eating their heads off in the paddock. My presence had become unwelcome to Mr. Blake. Well, then, to the road again and back to Melbourne. But Wolaroi! How could I leave the horse? I knew I could not—certainly not in the hands of Blake. I felt that Blake cherished a grudge against him, and would like an opportunity to give it vent. Clearly I must interview my old master and come to an arrangement. The notion did not please me; but I was enslaved by an attachment to Wolaroi. I seemed to have put some of my own soul and spirit into the horse, and I could not endure the thought of parting with him. But suppose Mr. Morland refused his consent? At breakfast I put the question plumply to Blake: "I've got to see Mr. Morland to-day, I want to start south—with Wolaroi—as soon as possible."

Blake gave me a sour glance. "The boss'll have a word to say to that," he said. "But you can't see him to-day. He's gone to Wagga. He won't be back till Monday, and Wolaroi don't stir from Terranora without he tells me. Not a foot."

"Which means that I've got to kick my heels here for another five days?"

"Please yourself about that, Mr. Horse-tamer. Go or stay, my troubles. But you ain't agoin to do my boss out of his chance at a Melbourne Cup. Not if I know it."

I made no reply, except to leave the room. Nothing was to be gained from bandying words with a man like Blake unless a black eye or two, and I did not covet that distinction. To pass the time I put a halter on Wolaroi (Blake saw it was not a bridle) and led him for a stroll. I returned three hours later riding him bareback, and guiding him with a willow switch. Blake witnessed the performance from his bedroom window. He did not work while Mr. Morland was from home. He was that sort of man. Wolaroi was my constant companion during my period of enforced waiting. When Sunday came I would not have parted with the horse for a fortune; for by then I could turn him loose in a paddock and he would follow me about like a dog, or come at my call from as far as he could hear it. One can't help but love a horse like that, and Wolaroi developed every day, both in affection and intelligence. On Sunday afternoon I went for a walk along the river bank, Wolaroi, as usual, my attendant. When we were about a mile from the station a fence prevented us making further progress together, so I set the horse at liberty to graze and went on alone. Ere long a pleasant willow glade tempted me to descend the bank and invade a hollow which some ancient flood had fashioned. It was carpeted with herbage and shaded with a line of towering eucalyptus. The noise of gurgling waters made a gentle music and suggested coolness sweeter than the shade. I pursued a slender footpath that struc

across the dell into the heart of the weeping willows. I remember that my pulses quickened as I reached the weeping willow curtain. I put aside the hanging screens and stepped into a broad bower of purple shadows, flecked with dark, delicious greens. The floor sloped to a sedgy river lip, where the water met the willow boughs; while the stream, scarce seen, complained among a multitude of smooth white pebbles, out beyond. It was an enchanting spot, but I did not learn its beauties all at once. Miss Morland was seated on a cushion with her back against a willow bole, reading a book of Bernard Shaw. I read his name upon the cover while she searched my face.

"Well!" she said at length.

I looked up from the book and met her eyes, and then I knew the meaning of the impulse that had carried me to Terranora. I knew, too, that I had never changed to her and could not change—whatever she might do to hurt or help me.

"You nursed me," I said unsteadily. "Did you recognise me, or was it just your rule?"

"Both," she answered, smiling. "Everybody expected you to die. You have made a wonderful recovery. You must possess a splendid constitution."

"Exceptional—for a jockey, no doubt," I countered, but instantly repented the unworthy thrust. "Please forget I said that," I protested, "I am really most grateful for all your kindness."

But she shook her head. "I deserved it, Mr. Counsel." She got to her feet and surveyed me with a calm and level gaze. "We have had a curious acquaintanceship. We have both made mistakes, I believe; I have realised mine. I hear that you are

leaving in a day or two. I hear, too, that you wish to take away the horse you have tamed?"

"Yes."

"I shall arrange the matter for you with my father, if you wish. He is absent for the moment, but——" she paused.

"You are extremely good, Miss Morland."

"I want to prove that I am no longer an absolutely impossible person for a jockey to regard without contempt. Goodness me, the scorn you poured out on that Redmount girl in your delirium! But she has made her final exit, Mr. Counsel. The scornful leading lady has been transformed into a companionable soubrette. How bewildered you look!"

"It's because I am not quick enough to follow you."

"Not, really? The problem is simple, it seems to me."

"You have the key of it."

She nodded. "Then I'll lend it to you. It is this. Terranora has taught me to remember that Redmount girl as an arrant little snob. What do you think of that?"

I clenched my hands to keep them at my sides. "She was never that," I said, a little huskily, perhaps. "She had a wrong point of view, but that was her worst fault."

Miss Morland's eyes danced. "But don't you prefer the Terranora girl?" she demanded.

"I want to know more of her before I judge."

Her eyes grew serious. "She proposes to be confident with you," she said, then with a grave, sweet smile continued presently, "and honest. Once you offered me your best gift, Mr. Counsel. I rejected it, and for the manner I am sorry. I did not want it. I do not want it, now. I am laying myself open to a

scalding snub. But I owe you something and—and ——"

Looking deep into her eyes I asked: "Is there anything you *do* want of me, Miss Morland?"

She nodded. "If we could start all over again I would like us to be friends," she said.

I walked to the willows curtain and returned. "You said you would be honest with me. Tell me, then, if this proposal of yours is only a method of making yourself square with yourself."

"No, it is not."

"You could choose a friend—who——"

"You are the only man who has ever made me think. I am capable of friendship, and I want yours. Well?"

"I haven't words," I stammered. "I'm not equal to the occasion. I—I——"

Miss Morland laughed outright. "Unaccustomed as you are to public speaking," she said mockingly.

I laughed, too, and my embarrassment took wings. "I should warn you at once, you will find me a crude sort of friend. You see I have had no experience."

"None?"

"Not a scrap. The only girls I know are barmaids, and they are not more than slight acquaintances. Should I have told you that?"

"Undoubtedly. But you have had plenty of men friends, of course?"

"Companions only. I never had a friend except my mother in my life."

"You have relatives?"

"Lots; but they all live in England. I have not seen them. Now, tell me about you. You know everybody worth knowing in Melbourne, and you have lots of relations with whom you must be intimate. Why have you no friends?"

"I am the victim of a suspicious, calculating nature, Mr. Counsel. When people got to learn that my father was going down in the world, lots of them were nicer to me than they ever were before. I repaid their kindness badly; I eventually offended them all, especially my relatives. My besetting sin is an odious pride, that scents patronage in courtesy and shrinks from pity as from fire. I'm not one bit a nice girl, Mr. Counsel."

"You couldn't be if you let pride govern you like that. It's a bad fault."

"I have others, too."

"So have I. But don't let's confess them. We'll find them out soon enough if——"

"If we remain friends?"

"If we don't mend them, I intended to say. Already I'm declaring war on some of mine. I'm going to try hard to be worthy of your friendship, Miss Morland."

She blushed, and of a sudden hung her head. "I wish you had not thought to say that," she said softly. Then she straightened and looked at me and smiled. "It was a little mean of you, I think. But I must renovate my standard, too? Shall we stroll to the homestead now? It is growing late."

I nodded and drew aside the willow curtain for her to pass.

Wolaroi whinnied when we topped the bank, and came trotting up to meet us at the fence. Miss Morland paused at the rails and regarded him doubtfully. "He tried to eat me once," she explained. "He is a reformed character, I know, but he may be hungry."

I unwound the halter from Wolaroi's neck, and led him to the fence. "This lady, sir, is a friend of mine," I solemnly announced. "She must not be eaten under

any circumstances. Nod your head to show you understand."

Wolaroi nodded his head. Miss Morland did not see me prod him on the near shoulder, which was the mainspring of the performance. It had cost me days to teach him that trick.

"Now," said I, "give the lady the sign of submission." Again I gave him his cue by uttering a throaty chuckle. Wolaroi bent his head until his nose touched his knees.

Miss Morland could not contain her delight. She exclaimed that I must be a wizard, and without further hesitation she proceeded to climb through the rails. But I was not minded to tempt Providence. Fearing she would wish to fondle the horse, I promptly turned him loose, and Wolaroi was glad to gallop away.

"Oh! why did you do that?" she cried. "I wanted to pet the dear fellow."

"He is not fit for such amenities just yet, Miss Morland. So far there is only one human creature whom he has learned not to fear. Fear makes a horse savage. He might have hurt you."

We parted at the gate of the little paddock that ought to have been a garden.

"My father will be home to-morrow," she said.

"Yes; and you will spend this evening alone."

"Not if you condescend to visit me, Mr. Counsel."

It was the first appointment I had ever made with a woman.

CHAPTER XX.

"SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY."

THE Blake family watched our meeting from afar. They could not understand, and their curiosity demanded satisfaction. She led me round the corner of the house to where two deck chairs occupied an alcove screened with canvas from the wind; but when she had chosen hers, I sat on the edge of the verandah near her feet.

"Modesty?" she demanded with a smile. I shook my head. "Just frowsiness; I have been obliged to wear one suit of clothes for seven weeks. They have been washed, of course, but they have shrunk. I'm playing cocky-farmer-from-out-back come to call on a lady—the squatter's daughter."

"Feeling shy?"

"Sure. Kin I smoke, marm? I don't know what ter do wid me hands."

"Smoke away!"

I lighted a cigarette. "How's your wheat?" she asked.

"Fine. That last shower saved the situation. I'll bag forty bushels to the acre."

"You a cocky farmer!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "You don't even begin to know your business."

"What should I have said?"

"That the rain came too late to do any good, and

that you expect your crop will be a total failure. There's no optimism in the back-blocks."

"I guess I'll stick to my last," I said, chagrined. "I've observed the pessimism you suggest, but I just naturally can't absorb it. How do you pass your time, Miss Morland?"

"I work."

"So I heard. You cook, do you not?"

"I am always busy. But I dress for dinner every night; it pleases my father. I tell you this to prevent you supposing that I donned fine feathers to put you out of countenance. You should see my hands."

"I am willing."

"No." She put them behind her. "I have a little vanity remaining. They are simply—appalling."

"Am I to believe you like—work?"

"You are not to pity me. In a different way my father works much harder than I do. Thank goodness, I insisted on being his companion. I know him now. He is one of the grandest men. Nothing can break his spirit—not even my bad cooking. I have never heard him utter a cross word. He suffers but on my account, not his. He is sixty years old, and he does as much as any three hands on the station. You have not seen him since your arrival; it is not his fault. He has been toiling night and day at Wedgiewa, where the sheep are. That is our own big chance—the sheep; our last chance, I fancy. You can have no idea what a man he is. I would go to the stake to help him; but the curse of my position is its impotence. I can do nothing for him but cook and dress for dinner, and pretend that I would rather live at Terranora than at Toorak."

"You pretend well, I am certain," I said, softly.

"Not well enough," she sighed. "Not half as well as he does. Only last week I let him take a splinter from my hand. I could have cut the hand off afterwards. It was too late. You should have seen his face. There was blood on his lip; but he smiled. Am I boring you?"

"Do you think so?"

She glanced at me, and shook her head, and looked away again. "He pretended not to notice," she proceeded, "but next day he rode twenty miles, and telegraphed to Sydney for shark-skin gloves for me to work in. I only knew it yesterday, when the gloves arrived. I cried over them like any fool."

"You're nearly crying now," I muttered savagely. "That's one thing about girls I can't understand. You cry when you're miserable, and you cry when you're happy. Now, I reckon you must be one of the happiest girls alive. You have a splendid father, and you are rightly proud of him. That's one cause, and a big one; but the next is bigger still. Your father needs your help, and you are helping him. You have, therefore, a jolly good reason to be proud of yourself. Happiness consists in two things—a worthy object to work for, and working for it worthily. You have one, and you are doing the other. You surely ought to cry your eyes out. Don't mind me."

Miss Morland stared at me for a little while; then of a sudden she began to laugh. "For sure, you are the queerest friend a girl ever had," she declared. "You are as unsympathetic as a shower bath. I don't feel a bit like crying now."

"Well, that's a mercy. And as for shower baths,

they give one sane ideas. Did you really want me to be sorry for you?"

"Y—yes, I suppose I did," she answered doubtfully.

"Your nerves are obviously not the thing. You don't want to look back on this period when you are an old woman and remember break-downs of any sort. Just contrast my lot with yours. I'll be returning to Melbourne in a day or two—and for what? Nobody and nothing to work for but the streak of selfishness you see before you."

"I don't believe you!" she cried.

"Oh! don't you? Why not?"

"You have ambitions; you have ideals. I am sure of it."

"I wish I had. I can see nothing but a blank sheet of paper, splashed in one corner with the figure of a horse."

"I wish you were not a jockey, Mr. Counsel."

"I'd rather be the Prime Minister of Australia, myself," I modestly confessed; "but there's the question of weight to consider. Try my hardest, I simply can't raise seven stone nine. That fact excludes me from politics, and bars all the nobler professions. I'm afraid I was cut out for a jockey, Miss Morland."

"You could never persuade me that you like the life."

"That being the case, I shan't try. May I be impertinent?"

"If you feel you must."

"I want to know what you and your father will do if the last chance you spoke of—the sheep—should fail?"

"I haven't a notion. Don't let us think of it. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' We should have to leave Terranora, of course."

"I've got a cottage in Melbourne, Miss Morland; not such a bad little place. It faces the Domain. It's shut up now. It would gladly open its doors to you and yours. You gave me leave to be impertinent, remember; and yourself asked me to be your friend."

Her eyes blazed at me, but she did not speak. After enduring her gaze for a few seconds, the anger, which she seemed always capable of exciting, boiled up within me.

"It's a downright nasty pride," I remarked offensively. "Misfortunes do very little good to some people. What dreaming fools men are to want to drive starvation from the world. Providence knows better than the philanthropists. Our friendship is definitely off." I rose as I spoke. "Good-night, Miss Morland."

She did not answer me, but turned her head aside, and gazed across the darkening paddocks.

"This is to be the end, then?" I challenged.

She was too interested in the paddocks to reply. I got back to my lean-to somehow—in the small hours of the morning.

CHAPTER XXI.

A HALF-SHARE IN WOLAROI.

I SPENT the next day with Wolaroi on the river bank, and was informed by Blake on my return that the Boss would see me at the homestead after supper. I rapped on the front door at eight, and was ushered by a frowsy maid into the office. Mr. Morland had not aged a day. He wore a dinner suit, and was smoking a cheroot, sitting bolt upright on a stiff blackwood chair.

"I learn with surprise that your real name is Counsel," he said curtly.

"Clifford Counsel," I responded.

"Basil Counsel was my fag at Eton," he remarked. "His son might have drawn upon me for something better than a billet as a stable boy."

"I did not guess you knew my father, sir."

He waved the subject aside. "My daughter tells me that you want to take away the horse you have tamed."

"Yes, sir. I have bought Blake's half interest——"

"The other half-interest belongs to my daughter. She will retain it, but you are at liberty to use the horse. I presume you desire to race him? You will, of course, account to my daughter for the half of any stakes he may win, charging her with a due proportion of expenses. Does this arrangement suit you?"

"Admirably, sir."

"We shall expect to be notified when he is ready, and as to his chances."

"Yes, sir."

"Will you train him yourself?"

"I propose to put him in Mr. Hilliard's stable, but I shall supervise his preparation."

"An excellent idea. Hilliard is an honest man. My advice is that Wolaroi should be entered for both Cups."

"In whose name, sir?"

"Hilliard's. Have you any objection?"

"None, sir."

"Then we shall consider that agreed. I shall forward you a cheque, care of Hilliard, for my daughter's share of the fees. Now that the horse is tamed he ought——. But what is your opinion?"

"Of his pace, do you mean?"

"Naturally."

"Frankly, sir, I have no idea. I've not seen him gallop yet. I have been absorbed, up to the present, in winning his confidence."

Mr. Morland raised his eyebrows. "Ah! indeed. Then you will be astonished. Wolaroi is fast, and a pronounced stayer. He may, of course, like so many others, be a failure in public; but I hope not. He has the advantage of a youth spent according to the laws of Nature. We flout Nature on the turf, Mr. Counsel; but she seldom fails to exact revenge. In my opinion there should be a law forbidding any man to race a two-year-old. The older I grow the more convinced I become that we should breed a better stock by reforming our customs. Were my

time to come over again, I would not allow a colt or filly of mine to be broken in until fully three years old."

"Wolaroi is rising five," I observed.

"Yes, and he was handled for the first time in his life last year. I shall watch his racing career with interest. I expect him to bear out my theory."

"I hope you will not be disappointed, sir. I, for my part, will do my best."

"I am sure of that, my lad—I beg your pardon—Mr. Counsel I should have said." He sat up more rigidly than ever. "If you care to know it, Mr. Counsel," he proceeded, in an icy voice, "I acquired a respect for your character and judgment during the term I had the honour to enjoy your services."

"It is good of you to say so, sir."

"Not at all." He stood up. "Is there anything else that I may do for you, Mr. Counsel?"

"Nothing, thank you, sir."

He extended his hand. "Then I shall bid you good-night."

"Good-bye, sir," I answered as we shook hands. "I start at daylight."

As I reached the verandah I flung out my arms to the air. The interview had stifled me.

In the early morning twilight I found a letter on the floor of my cabin. It had been tossed in through the open door-way while I slept. I read it by the candle.

"Dear Mr. Counsel,

If it is the end, I shall easily be consoled.

Yours truly,

Constance Morland."

I found pen and paper and wrote the following reply:—

"Dear Miss Morland,

It is not the end. A bad friend is better than none.

Yours truly,

Clifford Counsel."

I entrusted the note to Mrs. Blake, and took the road to Wagga. My last glance at Terranora showed me something white waving from an upper window of the homestead. I replied to the salute with my pocket handkerchief, and nearly frightened Wolaroi out of his wits.

CHAPTER XXII.

CLIPPING THE TIME.

MR. HILLIARD was not impressed either by Wolaroi's appearance or Mr. Morland's opinion of the horse's history and capabilities.

"The old gentleman was always a faddist," was the only remark he offered.

I felt discouraged, but I tried again. "He's grass fed, and he's carried me fourteen miles on top of a train journey. You don't see him at his best," I protested.

"I never could like his quarters," replied the trainer. "His lung space is all right, but no man could do anything with that coarse thickness."

"You wouldn't handle him, then?"

"Not at a gift. I hate all Minster's breed. They've served me too many tricks. Run like bullocks when you've backed them, and have you up before the stewards when they win. But don't let me put you off him, Tommy. He may be an angel in disguise. Come up to the house and have some tea."

"Thanks, but what about the horse? I'd rather figured on your training him."

"Put it out of your head, Cliff. I've got my hands full, and, anyway, I'm sick of Morland's luck. Train him yourself."

"Yes, but where?"

Mr. Hilliard laughed. "Isn't Parkhurst good enough for you? Shucks! lad, you ought to know you're welcome here. My missus got a room ready as soon as I read her your telegram. As for the horse, there's a loose box to spare. No. 6 is yours. Terms? Terms be hanged! You can pay your way and soothe your Scotch pride by giving me some of your spare time. I'll have heaps of mounts for you, too. There's a busy year in sight for all of us."

That is how I became an inmate of Mr. Hilliard's household, and Wolaroi a hanger-on. Within a week my poor horse was known to everybody in the place as the Outsider. Nobody liked him because of his bad manners and unfriendly ways. He was an improved character—a very saint when contrasted with what he was when I commenced his education—but he remained timid and suspicious, and the old devil peeped out not infrequently. When we sent in his nomination for the Cups, the whole stable sniggered, and I was unmercifully chaffed by the Hilliard family. I began his training by taking him for long, steady work on the sea beach, winding up with a swim in the surf.

It became the custom to ask me on my return: "Well, and how did the Cup horse go this morning?" It's queer to remember that at any moment in a period of six weeks I should have welcomed any decent excuse to withdraw him from training. That I stuck to my job was due to the fact that I felt under a moral obligation to Mr. Morland to give his theory every chance of making good. I had promised him to do my best, and my best had to be done. But Wolaroi would not fine down. The more work I gave him the bigger he became, and the more his

ugly quarters thickened. In those six weeks I wrote three letters to Miss Morland. They were merely reports on the horse's progress, and were not cheerful epistles. She did not reply, but at the beginning of the seventh week arrived a brief letter from her father:—

"Dear Mr. Counsel," it ran, "Blake has been shown your lugubrious effusions to my daughter. He wants to know why you do not race the horse? So do I. All the best Minsters do best when they appear too well off for condition.

Faithfully yours,

David Morland."

I took the note to Mr. Hilliard. He said little, but went to see the horse. After an examination that was prolonged, he requested details of the work I had been giving Wolaroi to do. "Humph!" he observed at last. "He is certainly thriving on hard labour. But the question is: Is he a racer? He looks more fit to be in the shafts of a brewer's waggon; but Lord knows. We'll try him over six furlongs with Effendi to-morrow, if you like, Tommy."

The whole stable turned out to see that trial. Chris Key rode Effendi, a weedy sprinter that Mr. Hilliard was saving for a suburban win. The hands gave me an ironical cheer as I trotted to the starting post. Wolaroi was an absolute stranger to the game, but his blood told immediately he sighted his competitor. From that moment he became a different creature. All the sluggishness, that had been my despair, instantly evaporated. He seemed to know that a challenge had been flung at him, and he burned to answer it. Long before we lined up he

was dancing like a mantis, and it required all my strength to manage him. He was crouched on his haunches when the flag fell, and he made so tremendous a spring that we secured a lead of five lengths in the first half furlong. We never lost it. Wolaroi galloped like a nicely-oiled steam engine, and I kept a grim hold of his head the whole way. Chris Key rode Effendi all out, but he did not gain an inch. Wolaroi finished unsweating and unblown; and he fought when I tried to stop him. He preferred miles to furlongs. Mr. Hilliard waited for me, watch in hand.

"Well?" I demanded. "What time?"

"One seventeen and a quarter." He turned to the hands. "Look here, boys," he said in a curiously harsh tone. "Not one syllable of this outside of Parkhurst. Understand me fully: If Wolaroi's name is mentioned by a single press tipster before his first win, I'll sack every mother's son of you that very hour, by God!" With that he strode off to the house.

I left the horse in charge of a dozen devotees, and followed Mr. Hilliard to his office. He pointed to a seat and carefully closed the door.

"Tommy," he said, speaking in a whisper, "if he really is a stayer, the Cup ought to be ours."

"Oh!" I gasped. "Which Cup?"

"The Melbourne Cup, of course. The horse reads like a wonder. You tell me he stays. We'll see about that double quick. Gee! if he does—if he does!"

I had never seen the man so moved. A thought came to me. "Did you clip the time?" I demanded sharply.

Mr. Hilliard nodded. "Took two whole seconds off it," he replied.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MY FAIR TENANT.

A week later, after giving him a lot of starting practice and other useful work, we tried Wolaroi over a mile and a quarter with Wood Nymph and Peterkin, two of the best horses Mr. Hilliard had in training. He made hacks of the pair, winning by four lengths, after making all the pace; and he cut out the distance in two minutes ten and a half seconds.

That evening I wrote to Miss Morland, begging her to persuade her father to leave Terranora and come with her to live in Melbourne, as my guests, until Wolaroi should rebuild the fortunes of their house.

No doubt it was a silly letter, yet I believed every word I wrote was true and wise. To me it seemed madness that the Morlands should waste their lives in a struggle against odds in the bush, while they might employ the little capital remaining them to magnificent purpose in the town. Such a thing as that Wolaroi might break down, lose, or be cheated out of a race, never entered my head. I felt certain that he must win both Cups, and many smaller races in the interim. So I set off the letter in good faith and waited on tenterhooks for the reply. Here it is, verbatim:—

"Dear Mr. Counsel,

My father and I have studied your kind proposals with the seriousness they deserve. My father has decided to follow your advice, but he cannot accept your generous offer anent the cottage. He would be glad to become your tenant, for the size and situation of the house accord with our requirements. But you must be our landlord and permit us to pay you a fair rent. Please tell nobody, except Mr. Hilliard, that we contemplate returning to town. We propose to live in complete retirement, and I am to be housekeeper. You must please fix a rent on strict business principles. Dear Mr. Counsel, I am almost beside myself with excitement. Father has gone to Wagga to see the bank. He is ten years younger, already. It is possible we may be leaving Terranora within ten days. Will the cottage be ready for us? Oh! it is so good to know that we are leaving Terranora. If you are extremely nice in the matter of the rent, I shall sometimes ask our landlord to tea. Some parts of your letter I did not like; but I forgive them for the central news. Father has written to Mr. Hilliard about his other plans. If Wolaroi starts in a race before we arrive, I want you to put on the enclosed £5 note for me. Father does not mind that you and I are friends. He says you have contrived to remain a gentleman in difficult circumstances. You will smile, perhaps, but I was intensely pleased to hear him say it—he so rarely praises anybody.

Sincerely your friend,

Constance M."

I went to the nearest post office and sent the following telegram:—

"Rent, thirty-five shillings. House ready. Expect prompt invitation to tea."

Mr. Hilliard came to me, later, wearing a lugubrious expression. "I've had a letter from Morland. The man is clean daft," he said morosely. "He is selling every hoof and hide he owns and coming to town to fling it away on Wolaroi."

"Fling it away?" I protested. "Come, come. Where is your faith in the champion?"

"I've seen many a champion go down before to-day," growled the trainer.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ENTERED FOR THE EPSOM.

THE Morlands arrived in Melbourne on the following Wednesday afternoon. I could not meet them, as Wolaroi had been entered for a five-furlong handicap at Epsom. Personally, I should have been glad to let Chris Key have the mount, but the trainer would take no risks. Wolaroi's temper had to be considered. I went to Epsom in an ill humour, wondering what Miss Morland would think, as, naturally, she would expect to see me at the station. My consolation was to give Mr. Hilliard the £5 she had sent me. Perhaps she would be more kind if I could return it multiplied. My own investment was a hundred pounds. I desired to bet more, but Mr. Hilliard declined to accept a larger commission. Despite Wolaroi's splendid trials, he continued to mistrust the horse; and so indeterminate was his mood that, long after the saddling-bell rang, he had not made a bet. I spoke to him, peremptorily, at length, and assured him I should hold him responsible if he failed to put on my money. There were fourteen horses engaged. I had drawn the inside berth, but I soon lost it. Wolaroi went up to the barrier as meekly as a lamb, but immediately our competitors began to crowd him, he gave a side-long plunge, and lashed out like an outlaw. The starter, lost his temper, and called me an ugly name.

Although my retort was of the mildest, it gave him an excuse to order me outside the field, and he gave the signal for the barrier to rise before it was possible for me to take up my penalty position. As a fact, our faces were turned the wrong way. Nine horses out of ten would have been hopelessly left; but not Wolaroi. I was caught napping, because I never dreamed the starter would let the field go until all of us were lined up. Wolaroi, however, wheeled as on a pivot the second the horses before us moved, and he was in the middle of the bunch under half a furlong. I saved my seat by ingloriously clutching at his neck; but it was touch and go, and I did not properly feel the saddle until we had swung into the straight. We were on the rails then, and securely pocketed by three horses, whose mocking riders were evidently acting in concert. There did not seem one chance in a million of getting through, so I hauled Wolaroi's head round, and simply dragged him out of the hole. The manœuvre cost three lengths, and compelled me to steer a course at a tangent for the judge's box, to avoid crossing the horses that we overhauled. I did not know what had won, because several riders were nearly abreast of me when I passed the post, but I did know that Wolaroi had covered a lot more ground than any other horse in the race. The silence of the crowd, however, gave me a gleam of hope. Not a cheer had been raised—not a shout. Obviously a rank outsider had secured the verdict. At last I got Wolaroi in hand, and turned for the weighing in. One glance at the board, and I was out of misery. Number 9 was on top.

"Damn that lightning streak of yours! He's robbed me of a monkey!" cried a famous and very

angry-looking jockey as I passed him. I smiled, and rode jauntily into the enclosure, but I was not really happy until I heard the steward say the magic words, "Correct weight."

"You've won a cool thousand, Tommy," said the trainer, as I joined him. "And I only wish to goodness I'd followed your lead. I got you ten to one for your hundred, and twelves for the odd fiver."

"Didn't you back him?" I cried, astounded.

"Not a bean of my own. Just a trifle for Mr. Morland," he replied, disgustedly. "To tell you the truth, Tommy, I got the jumps at the last minute. I fancied the beggar was too green. Well, it's my own fault."

"Never mind, sir, there's always the next time. He'll do better, too, next time. What did I win by?"

"Half a length."

"And the time?"

"One three and a half. I was on the second horse, Tommy."

"Humph! There was a big effort made to pocket me in the straight."

"I know. I wish it had come off. I was a fool."

"A bit of a rogue, too, Mr. Hilliard. What?"

He put his hand on my shoulder. "Straight to you, Tommy. You were in the joke."

I looked into his eyes, and believed him. But there was something that had to be threshed out. "There must be no more jokes with Wolaroi," I said quietly, "and I must have your word here and now, or we part company for keeps."

"You think a lot of that nasty beast, Tommy. He nearly got my face in his teeth to-day."

"He probably divined and resented your joke," I

retorted, grimly. "But I'll put it to you in another way. His 1min. 3½sec. to-day was honestly worth a tick under the minute. We were all but left at the post, and I had to pull him out of an ugly pocket, yet he won. Straight going pays with a horse like that."

"All right, Tommy. It shall be as you say."

"I have your absolute word, sir?"

"Ay."

I walked home to Mentone from the racecourse; and these were my thoughts: What a cursed game it is that can deprave and twist a man like Hilliard. Oh! to get out of it—to get out of it, utterly, absolutely, and for ever!

CHAPTER XXV.

AS HAPPY AS A FOOL.

I FOUND her sitting in my mother's favourite arm-chair, in the rose-garlanded verandah of the cot. Instantly the place shed its grievous recollections, and became home to me again. I had not yet recovered the trick of speech when Mr. Morland appeared. He greeted me with his usual stately courtesy, but there was a subdued excitement in his air; so I did not wait to be questioned, but plunged into a detailed relation of the race. Mr. Morland made one comment only, when the full story was told. "Hilliard must be losing his judgment." A moment later, he wished me good-night, and retired. I spent an interval counting Miss Morland's money. "Sixty-five pounds," I said at length. "Will you check it, please?"

She took it wonderingly. "Did I really win so much," she asked, in a hushed voice.

"Yes."

"And you—did you win, too?"

"I won a thousand pounds, Miss Morland."

"A thousand pounds! What will you do with it?"

"Use it to gain a fortune, by backing Wolaroi in the big Cups."

"Do you positively believe he will win them, Mr. Counsel?"

"I do."

"How I wish I were a man. I'd be your partner, very willingly."

Wolaroi's Cup. *Page 124.*

"And if he does: What will you do with—with your fortune? Will you leave the turf?"

"As a jockey, yes—for ever."

"But what will you do with your life? You'd not be an idler, surely?"

"Not that. It's my dream to buy and manage a station in the back country. I've grown to detest the town. I don't seem to breathe properly since I left the bush. You smile——"

"Not at you—at myself," she answered. "You know how eager I was to get away from Terranora. I was sad there, and very lonely most of the time. But, oh! the bigness of the place—the room it has for thoughts. Don't mistake me—I have no wish to return to Terranora; but this I have come already in a single day to know completely—I belong to the Bush. The call of the plains is in my blood. Some day I'll go back."

"And why not to Terranora?"

"Because there I first learned to know myself, and I do not wish to go to school again." She paused awhile, then went on in another tone. "And you, too, are enamoured of the Bush?"

"In a sense," I responded. "But it's a curious form of affection I've conceived for it. I love it; but I want to master it, or, rather, a bit of it. I want to hack out a holding in the wilderness, and cultivate the corner of some desert waste. I've a yearning to produce good things where nothing was ever produced before—but weeds. I'll be likely to make failures at the job, but I'm bound to tackle it. I feel it in my bones."

Miss Morland drew a deep breath. "That sounds fine!" she cried. "How I wish I were a man. I'd be your partner, very willingly."

"I'd be glad to have you—if you were a man," I said. Then I rose and left her.

We met frequently during the months that followed. Regularly, twice a week, I called at the cot and took tea with father and daughter. Always the same procedure was followed. At table we talked Wolaroi. Afterwards we men sat in the porch and smoked, while Constance cleared away the tea things and washed up. Mr. Morland never unbent to me, but remained as formal as an image. Immediately the girl rejoined us, he withdrew. She and I would while away the hours until eleven, chatting about many things; but invariably, towards the end, of our shared ambition to build an oasis in the Bush. And always our parting was the same: "How I wish I were a man!" she would exclaim; and I would smilingly reply: "That's where I have the best of you." Not after the first night did she add: "I'd be your partner, very willingly."

Those were the happiest months I had known, but in many respects it was a torturing association. Daily, I measured my progress, and it always seemed too small to turn a balance. Often I came near despair; yet I never did despair, because the more I studied her, I grew to realise a quiet strength of character that walled the mysteries within her as with a rampart. And at rare odd intervals I drew hope from her deep inscrutable eyes, which sometimes flashed a message that belied the calm austerity of her demeanour. Once only did that calm austerity relax.

An accident happened to deter me on a certain evening from my customary call. I wired an apology, and presented myself, as usual, on the third ensuing afternoon. She opened the door, but

promptly put her hand behind her back. "What was your engagement?" she demanded.

"A fire broke out at the stables. We had to watch it, all hands, through the night."

"Why did you not say so in your telegram?"

"I was too busy to think. I had only time to scrawl a few words. Besides that, Hilliard did not want anybody in Mentone to know. Am I forgiven?"

She smiled, and gave me her hand. "I thought something might have happened to Wolaroi," she explained. The woman I adored had lied to me, and we both knew it. The knowledge made me as happy as a fool.

CHAPTER XXVI.

INJUDICIOUS RIDING.

ALTHOUGH Wolaroi's first victory was achieved in a "Third Division" handicap—known among turfites as a "goats' race"—we found, on entering him again for a similar event at Sandown Park, that one handicapper, at least, had formed an accurate estimation of his merits. His name appeared in the second division, a six-furlong race, and his weight was eight stone twelve. Mr. Hilliard was for scratching him as a protest against what he was pleased to call a grave injustice. But Mr. Morland insisted he should run, and I was of the same mind. The field on this occasion was twenty-three strong, and it contained several fairly good performers. At the start of the betting, "Lucky" Solomon's Beehive was made a hot favourite; but as our stable commission was a fairly big one, the weight of the money told, and, when I emerged from the scaling room, I found the trainer awaiting me with the information that Wolaroi's price was five to four, and that Beehive had drifted back to sixes.

I rode to the starting post at an easy walk, dispensing with a preliminary, for I had given Wolaroi a five-furlong sprint at daybreak. My place was in the middle of the field. Beehive was on the rails. Wolaroi was in one of the nicest moods. Horses

crowded us on each side, but he showed no signs of viciousness, except to lay back his ears and tremble; and, responding to my soothing voice, he waited like a rock until the barrier lifted. Beehive, a noted swallow-catcher, was the first of all the horses to get moving; but Wolaroi was a good second, and as Beehive was promptly hauled back by his rider to the field, I led the bunch by several lengths at the five-furlong post.

"Go it, pacemaker!" yelled one of the jockeys behind me.

"Catch me, if you can!" I shouted, and I shook Wolaroi up. The great brute gathered up his haunches, and galloped in a fashion that made the air seem on a sudden chill. Every second the gap widened. Six, seven, eight lengths were gained. As we neared the half-mile, I was more than ten lengths to the good, and, as we swept into the long straight, I made for the rails, and gained them fully twelve lengths in front of Lucky Solomon's sprinter, who had ere then set out to catch me, and was several lengths ahead of the straggling field. At the distance I stopped riding, and felt at Wolaroi's mouth, knowing the race already won. Beehive began to close the gap, but Wolaroi was running like a machine, and was fighting me for his head. I leaned over his neck and looked back along his heaving withers; he was breathing like an infant in deep, unlaboured respirations. At the half-distance, Beehive had reached to within half-a-dozen lengths of us, but one glance told me he was spent. I sat back then, and dragged at Wolaroi's head. We passed the judge's box pulling up, but still two lengths to the good. Mr. Hilliard greeted me in the enclosure with a white face and blazing eyes.

"You d—— fool!" he hissed at me. "You've put three stone on the horse's back, and sentenced him to big events for life. Do you know the time?"

I smiled, and unbuckled the girth. "Something under evens, I suppose?"

"You did it in one fourteen. We might as well turn him out to grass at once."

"We shall," I replied, and went to weigh in.

Mr. Hilliard was cooler when we reached the paddock, but I was in a flame of indignation. "They are all calling him a Newmarket horse," he began. "I'm sorry I swore at you, Tommy, but it was enough to make a man wild. Did Wolaroi bolt with you—or what?"

I turned and faced him. "See here, Mr. Hilliard: Do you own Wolaroi?"

"No."

"Are you even his trainer? Did you not positively refuse to train him?"

"N—no—yes—but——"

"And haven't you always depreciated him? Yes, even to-day, before the race? Well, for the future, kindly remember that I'm not a stable boy to be abused for doing what I choose with my own. I rode to win. Let that content you. Wolaroi goes out of training to-morrow. His next start will be the Caulfield Cup. You've had your chance to make your fortune on the bye; if you have failed, the fault is yours alone. If you are dissatisfied, say the word, and we'll arrange a transfer on the register."

"I didn't mean what I said, Tommy. I was mad at myself more'n at you. Do what you like with the horse, but don't let us quarrel. I've apologised; a man can't do more'n that. Won't you shake hands?"

There was nothing else to do, it seemed; but I think I would have flung my hand in his face if it had been possible for me to read the figures in his betting book. I learned long afterwards that he had joined "Lucky" Solomon, and had backed Beehive to win him £3,000, using Mr. Morland's money and mine to make a market for the supposed good thing.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SHADY TRANSACTION.

TRUE to my determination, I threw Wolaroi out of training, and for the ensuing six weeks he enjoyed the run of a first-rate clover paddock. I made a point, however, of spending an hour or two daily with the old fellow for the purpose of continuing his moral education. When the weights for the two big Cups were announced, I was not surprised to find he had been allotted 8 stone 5 pounds for the Caulfield Cup; but the Flemington handicapper had treated him more kindly. For the great two-miles race he had been given only 7 stone 7 pounds, a mere stone above the minimum. We held a conference at the cot that evening—Mr. Morland, Constance, Hilliard, and myself, and we formed one pool of £1,000 to back Wolaroi for the double, and another £2,000 to back him outright for the Caulfield Cup. This commission, it was understood, should be executed by Mr. Hilliard for our joint benefit; but after it had been placed, we were each to be at liberty to make any further wagers. Hilliard wasted no time over the business, and he managed so well that, before the week was over, the syndicate stood to win £80,000. The effect on the market was quickly demonstrated, and the first betting list I got showed Wolaroi heading the quotations at 10 to 1. My horse, in fact, was favourite for the Caulfield

Cup. The following week was a busy one for me. I spent it chiefly amongst the bookmakers. When it closed almost every shilling I possessed was mortgaged to the ring. At the risk of £500, I contrived to secure an aggregate of £18,000 for the Melbourne Cup; and by pledging another £1,200 I acquired the right to collect £12,000 (in addition to my share of the syndicated commission), should Wolaroi win the Caulfield. From that day forth Wolaroi's position in the market hardened steadily. Seldom had there been such a strong fancy shown for a comparatively unknown horse. The papers were full of guarded comments, and they published full details of his pedigree and his two obscure suburban performances. One heard his name everywhere—on the trams, in the train, and even in the street. The general opinion seemed to be that he must have shown his "people" a wonderful trial to justify their confidence in him. Mr. Hilliard was bombarded with inquiries, and so was every member of his stable and household. All returned one answer—the truth, viz., that we had tried the horse thoroughly, and we believed he would win. The public followed the stable lead, and Wolaroi shortened to sixes, then to fives. The thing was unprecedented. Some people said it was uncanny. But it was a grand thing for Dagonet and his owner, Mr. Wolstenholme. Dagonet was an imported six-year-old horse, by Gunbarrel, out of Wild Fire, in the stable of Jake Goodall, one of the finest judges in Australia. It was stated truly of old Jake, that he had trained more classic winners than any other two men at the game, and his reputation for straight going was unimpeachable. Dagonet was the apple of Jake Goodall's eye. The horse had, in the past

year, won two notable weight-for-age races in Sydney, and he had run a good second in the previous Caulfield Cup. The handicapper had allotted him 9 stone 5 pounds, a substantial increase on his former impost; but, almost from the moment the weights appeared, Jake had proclaimed his belief that Dagonet was the only horse in the race, and the owner and all the stable connections backed his judgment heavily. The market rush for Wolaroi splendidly assisted them in this concern. For a term Dagonet stood within a couple of points of Wolaroi, but as soon as the public money began to pour in for the latter, Dagonet fell away in the betting, and despite persistent support from the right quarter, he receded to fifteens. I am unable to account for the public preferring Wolaroi to a well-known and tried horse in the famous Goodall stable, but it is a fact, they did. At that time I, personally, gave Dagonet no serious thought. I knew the horse, and had ridden him to victory in a mile and a quarter handicap race at Flemington. I believed him a fair performer over a middle distance, but it never occurred to me to compare him, at the weights, with Wolaroi. When Hilliard, one day, asked me to make the comparison, I bluntly requested him to talk common sense. But the trainer was as grave as an owl.

"I'm not pulling your leg, Tommy," he said, soberly. "I saw Jake last night, and he is quite certain that Dagonet can beat us."

"It is because he knows nothing of Wolaroi."

Hilliard shook his head. "He knows as much as we do. I told him everything I know, at any rate; but he never turned a hair. I tell you I got the cold shivers while I was talking to him. I offered to let

him in with me for a saver, but he declined to take a shilling, and, more than that, he begged me, for my wife's sake, to save myself on his horse."

"Look here, Mr. Hilliard," I cried, with the cocksure confidence of youth, "if you hedge on Wolaroi, I'll write you off my books for a numbskull! Pish, man! you know the horse. You've seen him tried over every possible distance up to the championship. There's nothing in Australia can touch him. I'll engage to beat Dagonet by twenty lengths. The race is in our pockets."

But Hilliard looked gloomier than ever. "'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,'" he observed, lugubriously.

I put my hand on his shoulder. "See here, old chap: I'm going to show you your worst fault—the fault that has kept you from being a rich man. It's this: You have a kink in your character which forbids you to like or to trust the thing that is nearest your eyes. You know Wolaroi, and you like him; but because he is, in a sense, your own horse, you are ready to believe the next man has a better. For goodness sake, don't repeat your folly at Epsom and at Sandown. Wolaroi will win the Caulfield Cup, in spite of fifty Dagonets."

During the ensuing fortnight, Dagonet's price shortened from fifteens to eights, and the word went round that he had been backed for a fortune. Wolaroi, on the other hand, went back a point; but, as a third horse, Mistral, about that moment came into the market, and shortened from fifties to fifteens, I thought little of these movements, and never dreamed that Hilliard had had anything to do with them. My awakening came on the third day before the Caulfield Cup. In the interim, the train-

ing of Wolaroi had proceeded steadily, and without a hitch. The horse was in every respect one in a million.

The task of preparing most horses for great races is usually one of incessant bother and constant strained anxiety. The average citizen who goes to see a Cup, and has his senses delighted by witnessing the magnificent thoroughbreds which are to compete parade in all their pride and strength and beauty before him, has no conception of the pain and labour it has cost to turn out each of these horses in fit condition to engage in and survive the gruelling contest. The fact is, none but horses of exceptional strength and stamina can endure a Cup preparation, and that is why a large majority of the entrants is invariably scratched before the race eventuates. The preparation inexorably discovers and weeds out the weaklings, and the few who come through successfully, and go to the post, belong to a class superior to the rest of their breed.

But, even when a really great horse is being trained for a Cup, the job is extremely delicate and onerous, and it usually calls for an amount of skill and patience to tax the resources of a Job. The racehorse is by no means a machine. On the surface he looks a monument of toughness and strength. And so he is, both tough and strong. But these qualities are not impregnable. His nervous system is so highly developed, and his constitutional organs are so delicately adjusted, that the merest trifle may at any moment fling the apparatus out of gear, ruin his chances, and render the trainer's work of weeks and months an absolute waste. He is so susceptible to chills, that a delay of a few minutes in rubbing him down after a gallop may set up an inflammatory cold, from

which he will not easily recover. His digestive machinery, too, is poised in operation on so fine a balance, that a mere handful of unusual or improper food, or an excessive handful of his customary and appropriate food, may create disorders sufficiently distressing to compel a prolonged rest at a moment when sustained work is essential to his prospects.

I have handled and helped to train many great horses, and, with one exception only, they have been of the constitution I have attempted to describe. The exception was Wolaroi. Whether it was due or not to his youth having been spent in the shelterless wilds of the bush, I do not know; but he possessed an organic hardness that matched the splendid texture of his muscular vigour. I took no risks with him, of course, but accidents will happen, however one plots and plans to prevent them, and on two occasions Wolaroi was subjected to tests which would have spoiled the training of an ordinary thoroughbred.

On the first occasion, while being led to work by a stable boy, a circus caravan that comprised several camels chanced to pass along the road to windward of the park. Wolaroi no sooner scented them on the breeze than he broke away from the boy, and bolted across the farm, jumping two fences in his career, and galloping several miles before his panic evaporated. The entire stable, including myself, thought it was "all up" with his preparation then; but, to our amazement, he was as fresh as paint after a night's rest, and on the following morning he showed us a six-furlong sprint on the track that would have accounted for a Newmarket.

The second accident was the bursting, one night, of a water pipe in the loft above the stall. This condemned the poor old fellow to stand in a flooded box for some hours, shivering beneath the incubus of a drenched rug. By all the rules, Wolaroi should have contracted pneumonia on the spot; yet he escaped without the symptom of a cold.

But my story lags. Some little while before the Cup, I had the luck to ride two winners at a suburban meeting, and thereby I "raised the wind" to the tune of about three hundred pounds. Common sense suggested I should nurse this sum, in case of unforeseen disaster; and I contrived to be wise for a period. But Wolaroi's perfect health and condition undid my resolution, and, three days before the Cup, I went into the city to make a final assault upon the ring. It had been my first intention to bet with the Leviathan's successor, but chance decided otherwise. As I left the station, I met an acquaintance named Surbiton, a rather noted punter, who volunteered that he was on his way to the office of a bookmaker, who was widely known by the sobriquet, "The Duke," to back an outside fancy for the Cup. Then he asked me my business in town, and the end of it was I accompanied him to "The Duke's" office. We found "The Duke's" partner in charge, who supplied us with the latest price list. We sat down and studied the figures for a while, but, suddenly, Mr. Surbiton threw at the bookmaker a question.

"What's the meaning of Mistral's short price?" The horse has done nothing. Has he been backed?"

"Oh, yes, quite heavily," answered the other.

"I'd like to know," sneered Surbiton. "I'm told he's a bookmaker's horse, market-made, to rope in the public."

"The Duke's" partner looked up sharply. "That's a slander, and it's quite untrue," he declared with emphasis. "Mistral has been backed for a big stake by lots of people. 'The Duke' is angry about the story, and he has asked me to refute it. See here!"

Speaking, he took a pocket-book from one of the pigeon-holes before his desk, and opened it at random. "There you are," he cried, triumphantly. "Connors, £1,000 to £50; Lake, £1,000 to £40. Here again—Buzacott——"

I glanced up from my price list, and my eyes fell on the open pages of the extended book. It was "The Duke's" betting book. I was uninterested in the discussion, but not for more than a second, in the book. A double entry I saw written there at the top of the leaf sent the blood flooding to my face. It was this:—

Dagonet ... £5,000 to £400—S. Hilliard.
" ... £3,000 to £300 " "

So, Mr. Hilliard had hedged on Wolaroi, and had backed Dagonet for £8,000 with one bookmaker, alone. I left the office very thoughtfully, and drove out in a taxi to the Cot. I found Mr. Morland and his daughter sitting down to lunch.

"You have had bad news!" cried the girl. "What is it, Tommy?" (She had never named me so before.) "Tell me quickly. Has anything gone wrong with Wolaroi?"

"Nothing with Wolaroi; but Hilliard has backed Dagonet for a large sum—he only knows how large." And then I poured out my story. The girl hardly appreciated the significance of it, and so great was her relief to know that Wolaroi was all right, that she smiled. But Mr. Morland did not smile. For

the first time since I had known him he became human, and his grey eyes flashed like sword points. Yet he never lost his austere self control. Pouring himself out a glass of water, he sipped half of it before speaking.

"I am beginning to understand," he said, at length.

"Understand what, father, dear?" asked Constance.

"Why it was that, although Morland Park was my ruin, Samuel Hilliard, on whose advice I always acted, was able, after the crash, to blossom forth as an independent trainer in a large establishment of his own."

"Father!—father!" gasped Constance. "Have you the right to think such an awful thing of him?"

Mr. Morland slightly shrugged his shoulders. "What is your opinion, Mr. Counsel?" he demanded.

"I know him to be a timorous and indecisive operator," I replied; "but until to-day I have always believed him an honest man."

Our eyes met in a long, mutually-searching stare. Finally, he nodded. "I am sorry we cannot ask you to stay to lunch, Counsel," he said; "but——"

"Oh, father!" interrupted Constance.

"We are not inhospitable, dear," explained the old gentleman. "We are rational beings, that is all. Mr. Counsel is absent from his post of duty, and this is a time when one unguarded minute may wreck our fortunes. Mr. Counsel is about to resume his place in the motor, which I hear puffing outside, and drive full speed to Mentone. And we shall not see him again until after the Caulfield Cup is run and won. He will never leave Wolaroi unguarded, henceforth; and he is resolved, I can see, to spend the next few nights in the horse's box. I take you

correctly, Mr. Counsel, I am sure?" He held out his hand. I grasped it warmly, nodded, and retired hurriedly from the room. Constance rushed after me. Positively, I had forgotten her. She overtook me in the passage, and put her hand upon my sleeve.

"It is all very dreadful," she murmured; "but you must say good-bye to me, you know."

There was a look in her eyes that acted on my veins like wine.

"You called me Tommy," I whispered.

Her cheeks flew a scarlet signal, but her eyes did not waver from mine.

"You are doing so much for us," she panted. "Everything depends on you."

"Is that the explanation?"

"You know it is not. Say something nice to me, Tommy—something comforting. Remember, I shall be three days alone with fear."

It was a chance to show myself something better than a monument of selfishness. I did my best to rise to it.

"I'll do all a true friend can," I answered. "Rest easy, little woman; there's danger, but we've been warned in time. I'll win; my life upon it!"

And I did not even kiss her hand.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DOPED AND DONE FOR.

NOTHING had happened to Wolaroi. He was as right as right could be. During the afternoon Hilliard and I had a little chat as we watched the big fellow munching his oats.

"He looks fit enough to run for a man's life," said the trainer, thoughtfully. "Are you still as confident as ever you can do the trick, Tommy?"

"Provided he's neither dosed nor doped," I replied. "But I'll take care of that. I intend to bunk in his stall until Cup Day."

Hilliard gave me an astonished glance. "You don't imagine any monkey business would be tried here?" he demanded.

"Dagonet has been backed as though he must win, Mr. Hilliard. Our horse is only favourite now by a couple of points, and thirty horses will breast the barrier. It would pay the ring to spend a few thousands, if thereby an outsider were to collar the prize. We look safe here, but I'm not going to run any risks?"

The trainer scratched his head, and frowned. Presently, he said: "Maybe you're right, my boy. It's a good fault, anyway, to be over-careful. Did you hear about Chris Key?"

"What about him?"

"He has lost the mount on Stargazer. Milton and he had a quarrel, and Milton is putting up Frank M'Garry instead. I'm sorry for the lad. I could have fixed him a week ago, but it's too late now. He'll have to stand down altogether. He has not been out of a Caulfield Cup for ten years, till this. I found him in his room a bit ago, crying like a baby."

"Poor beggar," I commented. "I'm sorry for him, too."

"He's very bitter about you, Tommy. He thinks he ought to have been given the mount on Wolaroi, especially now that the horse has made friends with him. He vows you'll throw the race away."

"Oh! does he?"

"He has backed Dagonet, Tommy."

"He is welcome."

"You don't quite take me," said the trainer. "General principles is all right, Tommy; but, take my advice, and keep an eye on Chris. There's no disguising that he has his knife into you."

"I'll not let him catch me napping," I replied; "nor anybody else, if I can help it." Then I faced him squarely. "You've not hedged on Wolaroi, have you, Mr. Hilliard?"

He told me the lie with the composure of a craftsman in mendacity. "Me! Not a shilling, Tommy. Fact is, I'll be hurt badly if Wolaroi loses, and that's why I've backbited Chris Key. The boy may be square as you or me."

His duplicity disgusted me so much that I abruptly closed the conversation. That night passed uneventfully, as I was sure it would; for, even if a trick had been planned, the sudden knowledge of my presence in the stable would have com-

pelled a postponement. I was so confident of this, that I kept no real watch, and enjoyed a good sleep in the straw. On the following night I did not close my eyes, but once more nothing happened. On the last night there was a change. Just on 1.30 Wolaroi awoke out of a doze, and uttered a loud snort. My senses are pretty sharp, and they were on a high tension. But I had seen and heard nothing to account for Wolaroi's alarm. "What is it, old fellow" I asked, soothingly; and I went over to him, and began to stroke his head. But he shook off my hand, and, uttering another snort, backed away from the manger towards the door of the box. Obviously, the cause of his alarm was to be searched for in the manger. Seizing the lamp, I approached it, and, as I did so, I distinctly heard a rustling behind the partition. A moment later the mystery stood revealed. A solid plank of the back wall had been drawn back, then closed again, but not closed perfectly. A thin draught was even then blowing through the aperture, which made the flame flicker in the lamp I carried. Hardly breathing with excitement, I touched the loose plank with my finger, and it yielded as though suspended by a hinge above. My eyes travelled up, then down, until arrested by the feed box. It was half-filled with a mess of lukewarm bran mash! I pushed back the loosed panel, and shouted through the aperture: "You've failed, you scoundrel. Do you hear?" Silence answered me. No doubt the doper was already far away. I put a halter on Wolaroi, and an extra rug, and led him to another loose box, which I knew to be vacant, and there we spent the remainder of the night. A little before daylight two grooms appeared. I sent one of them for Mr. Hilliard, and the trainer was

with me within five minutes. His first words were dramatically innocent. "What the deuce are you doing with the horse here?"

"Look in the other box!" I countered.

We stared at each other in the pale morning light —he, questioningly at me; I, with all my heart afire with indignant accusation. Then he swung on his heel and went away. He was absent about ten minutes. When he returned he looked deeply troubled.

"He did not eat any of it?" he demanded.

"Not a grain."

"Thank God for that!" he cried, earnestly. I gazed at him, and, against my will, my doubts of him began to lessen. "Did you see the poisoner?" he asked.

"No."

"That's bad luck!" There was no relief in his tone—merely exasperation. "I've locked the barn door," he added, "and given orders for nobody to go near the stall. It's a case for the police, I reckon, and perhaps a black tracker. There's a good deal of bran on the planking, Tommy; that means finger-print evidence. We'll lag that scoundrel yet, or I'm a Dutchman. It's Chris, I'm afraid."

I shook my head. Confident now that I had misjudged Hilliard, I felt no craving to be revenged on a petty underling.

"Let it go," I said with a shrug. "Whoever he is, the rascal has failed. That's all I care about. I'm not going to be mixed up in a public scandal You can do what you like, but count me out."

I left him pondering the question, and took Wolaroi for his last pipe-opener. The grand old horse did three furlongs in 37½ seconds, and came

back to the stable without a speck upon his glossy coat. From that instant until a little after noon, when we reached the saddling paddock, I did not leave him for a second. The hour struck, however, when I was compelled to resign my trust into the trainer's hands, in order to dress and weigh in. It is all a blur in my memory, that interval. Anxiety ate into my vitals. Fear kept hammering at my brain that, even now, although under the eyes of hundreds of people, some deadly mischief might be done the horse. After what seemed years of waiting, I was released. I ran at top speed down the lane into the birdcage. A glance showed me the stall empty, but I quickly spotted Wolaroi. Hilliard was holding him about the middle of the green, and showing him off to a group of gaily-dressed people. As I approached I saw a gentleman step forward and stroke his neck. Then a thing occurred I will never forget. Wolaroi suddenly flung himself back on his haunches, reared erect, and struck out at the air with his forelegs. The ladies screamed and scattered like a flock of chickens. The gentlemen followed suit with scarce a scrap more dignity. But it was all over in a moment, and when I got to the spot, Wolaroi was under Hilliard's control again. "You should not have let anybody touch him," I declared, indignantly. "Who is that man?"

"What man?"

"The one who stroked him—that man yonder; see, he is going off."

Hilliard shook his head. "I don't know," he confessed. "He's a stranger to me. He came along—just now. I thought he was with Mrs. Goodall."

"Ask her if she knows him," I commanded—"quickly."

Hilliard bridled at the tone I used. "Oh, bosh!" he cried. "Time enough after. You are suffering from nerves, my lad. He hasn't hurt the horse. Here, pass me that strap."

I permitted the subject to drop for the business in hand, and a moment later I was in the saddle. I haven't the heart to describe in detail the race that followed. Twenty-six horses lined up at the barrier, and the start was very nearly a perfect one. We got well away, and were soon at the head of the bunch behind the pace-makers. This position we kept without difficulty, until the mile post. Then came the most desolating experience of my life. Without a scintilla of warning, the great horse I rode began to rock and wallow in his stride. I thought my mind was going. It could not be true. It was impossible to be true. Wolaroi!—my Wolaroi!—the horse I had trained and tested so tremendously! Surely, I must be taking leave of my senses. The long night watches, the protracted strain—they must be telling on me. But I set my teeth, and fought it out. Even with a demented jockey, Wolaroi could win, must win. I thought of Mr. Morland, I thought of Constance. We swept into the straight. Were those seven horses ahead of me, or seven devils? I saw blood, and fleshed my whip; Wolaroi was falling back. My arm rose and fell like a flail; I shouted like a maniac. Wolaroi made a great effort, and gained a little ground. Once more we headed the bunch, and there were only three horses in front of us—Dagonet, Mistral, and Old Silver. Suddenly, there were four, then five, then eight. Then the field began to pull up. Wolaroi stopped of his own volition—the horse that had always fought me at the finish! Had we passed

the judge's box? As in a dream I listened to the salvos of the crowd. "Dagonet!" they were shouting. "Dagonet!" I urged Wolaroi (he had to be urged!) into the enclosure, stripped off his saddle, and weighed in. A crucifying interview with the reporters followed; but at length I found myself standing beside Mr. Hilliard in the paddock, gazing at the beaten favourite. He was speaking to me: "He's only a sprinter, Tommy, after all. Never one of his breed will I trust again. Never, while I live. They've got no heart for a real fight, lad. But, cheer up, Tommy! I've got a shot in the locker left. I hedged at the last moment, Tommy, thank God. I backed Dagonet, and there's a bit of it for you."

I heard him vaguely, but most of my dazed attention was fastened on Wolaroi's drenched flanks and bleeding sides. Presently two of the stipendary stewards came along, and with them a noted veterinary surgeon. All three examined the horse, but the veterinary the most carefully. "Overtrained," he said. "The horse has been wound up to too high a pitch, and he has suddenly become unstrung." That statement settled the question of any possible official investigation; and a moment later, Wolaroi and I were left alone, for Hilliard had horses running in other races, and his staff had no time to waste on a pair of pricked bubbles. I was still staring vacantly at the distressed brute, when a familiar voice broke in on my musings. "That horse wants a rub down and a dose of strychnine," it declared. I turned and met the eyes of Dr. Ducie, the man who had once saved my mother for me, for a time. He nodded cheerily. "A regular boil over, Clifford, what? I backed him, too. Sorry I can't say 'thank you' for the tip, young man."

Too wretched to reply, I seized my cloth and rubbing brush and set to work. Dr. Ducie leaned against the post of the stall and watched me. "That's curious," he observed, "he is evidently cool yet he continues to sweat. Did you give him any stimulant before the race, Clifford?"

"No, doctor, not a thing."

"Did you notice anything peculiar about him during the race?"

"Something that's driving me mad."

"What was it?"

"He wallowed at the mile post, and after that he ran like a ship at sea."

The doctor nodded. "Looks like morphia. Your horse has been doped, Clifford."

"Impossible, doctor. I haven't left him for a moment, night or day. He hasn't eaten a mouthful nor drunk a drop, except what I myself have given him."

"There are more ways of killing a dog than by hanging him. See here!" He strolled forward and patted Wolaroi on the neck with his right hand. "That would be enough," he said, and stepped back, showing me a hypodermic syringe that had been concealed in the palm.

"My God!" I gasped, my mind illumined. "A strange man patted the horse a minute or two before the race, just as you did, only with this difference. Wolaroi flinched from his handling and reared and plunged."

"Your friend must have thrust the needle into a nerve centre," explained the doctor. "He used morphia—a fair dose, too, I fancy. The symptoms are unmistakable. Say, Clifford, you had better have the horse attended to at once, if you want to save him from serious trouble."

"There won't be a train to Mentone until nearly six——"

"Put Mentone out of your head. The horse wants boxing and dosing straight away. I'll tell you what you do. I'm not using my stable now, for I got a motor car last month. Lead him there by road, and before you arrive I'll have everything ready. I'll bring along a vet if you like, but if you take my advice you'll let me steer the ship this trip. It would take a week to convince any ordinary vet that the horse had been given morphia."

"It's mighty good of you, doctor."

"Cut it out, Clifford. What about a vet?"

"I'd rather you than a hundred vets, doctor."

"Good, then get a move on you!"

He nodded and strode away. Only waiting to rug Wolaroi, I led him from the racecourse, leaving a brief message at the gates for Hilliard. The journey was not a long one, but the doctor had traversed it ahead of me by car, and I found him, assisted by his chauffeur, bedding a stall with fresh, sweet-smelling hay.

"Lucky for you I wasn't able to sell my fodder to the chap who bought my neddy," he sang out, brightly. "What d'ye think of this for a loose box, Clifford?"

"It's a beauty, doctor."

"Your luck again If it hadn't been made of brick, I'd have long since converted it into a garage. There, that will do, Soames. Take the horse right in, Clifford. That's the ticket! Now, I'll cut into the house and get some strychnine. Half a mo!"

Within a mere few minutes he returned holding a charged syringe. "He won't play up, Clifford?" he demanded.

"No, doctor, not while I'm by; but anyway he

doesn't seem to have a kick left in him, poor beggar."

"We'll soon fix that up." He stooped as he spoke and plunged the needle behind Wolaroi's fore-arm.

The horse stood like a rock, not seeming to feel the prick at all.

"The right thing now is a mild, yet searching, powder. It is important we should give nature every assistance to eliminate the poison. I'll not keep you a jiffy."

He hurried off again, and was back before I had smoked a cigarette. "I've made it into a ball," he announced. "Let me see how clever you are, Clifford."

Wolaroi made no sort of resistance. He suffered me to put the bolus down his throat as gently as though taking medicine were a matter of daily habit. The reason was obvious. We saw it in the dullness of his eyes, and the pathetic drooping of his head. It wrung my heart to see him so.

"Have you any suspicion who did it?" asked the doctor, as though reading my thoughts.

"None," I replied. "Please God, I'll never know."

"Why?" he asked, astonished.

"I'd have to hang for him," I answered.

The doctor made no comment, but he put his arm round my shoulder and urged me into his house. His kindness was unwearying and infinite. Insisting that I should be his guest until Wolaroi had recovered, he ordered a room to be prepared, forced me to smoke an excellent cigar and drink a glass of sparkling hock. I was so unnerved by the happenings of the day, that the wine affected me a deal, but not as much as his comradeship and the unexpected knowledge that I owned such a friend. The dinner he gave me was fit for a Lucullus, but I was thinking of Constance

Morland. The doctor knew. After it was over, we went and had another look at Wolaroi. His feed was untouched, and he had all the appearance of being a done horse. The doctor led me from the stable. "You've got to see her," he said. "My man will run you in and call for you again at any hour you tell him. I'll stay home with Wolaroi. Don't fret about the horse, Cliff. He's sick to-night, but I'll promise you a difference in the morning."

Then he took me out to the road and pushed me into the waiting motor car. There are good Samaritans in this world who never saw Samaria.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MISS CONSTANCE PROPOSES.

MR. MORLAND waited at his door for me. He was simply magnificent. He grasped my right hand and put his left upon my shoulder.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I want to ask a favour of you, no self reproaches! We both know that you did your best, and we both know that your best meant everything it was possible for a human being to do. Thanks; now come in and tell us all about it."

Constance was standing by the table, as slender as a lily and as white, but she gave me a smile of understanding and encouragement.

"It was just not to be," she murmured. "We are most terribly sorry for you, Tommy."

"I'm nothing," I blurted out. "We were swindled out of the race by the meanest sort of trick. A strange man patted the horse while I was coming from the scales, and dosed him with morphia—a hypodermic syringe. We did not guess till afterwards. We only guess it now—but it's a good guess. Wolaroi has all the symptoms, and he is very ill. Dr. Ducie is sure of his diagnosis and is treating him, but I doubt if the poor fellow will recover."

I told my story more coherently, in answer to detailed questions, but it was clear that neither was impressed with it. Mr. Morland shook his head. He thought my evidence too vague and thin to inculpate

anybody or anything, except Wolaroi's capacity.

"May be you are right, Counsel," was his final comment; "but no jury would convict a dog on such testimony—and you admit you did not even see the face of the man you suspect of having operated on the horse. Futhermore, the veterinary surgeon, who examined him after the race, saw nothing to arouse a suspicion of foul play. 'Overtrained,' was his verdict. Personally, I incline to his opinion, and I'll add a word on my own account—over-rated."

The word stung me, but I bit my lip and turned to Constance, hoping the find her less ready to condemn poor Wolaroi. Her face was serious and sad.

"I am afraid we all thought too much of him," she replied, in answer to my unspoken question. Mr. Morland lighted a cigar.

"It is not my fate to make money on the turf," he said, lightly. "This experience would have been a blessing to me twenty years ago. I'd like to believe that you'll profit by it, Counsel. It has hurt you, I can see. But you are young, and youth is splendidly resilient. Touching this cottage, you'll not insist on my giving you a lengthy notice, I feel sure. I accepted this afternoon the management of Tareel Downs, a station on the Darling. I propose to go north on Monday evening's train."

"With Miss Morland?" I stammered. I dared not look at her. He raised his brows.

"My daughter will follow me in a week or two. The place is somewhat rough at present, I am given to understand. In the meanwhile she will stay with her cousins, the Walter Sorensons."

"I would much, much rather go straight up with you, papa. No—not only on your account, dear. I detest the Sorensons."

Mr. Morland shrugged his shoulders.

"You did not always dislike them, Constance. They are most anxious to have you, and we must not forget that it was Walter who secured me this most opportune appointment."

He turned to me with a grave, sweet smile. "It is good medicine for a man to be forced to undergo obligations, Mr. Counsel; for a woman, too, I fancy. Life is not as sour a taskmaster as we are prone to suppose."

He got to his feet. "Good night to you, Counsel; no doubt I'll see you again before I sail."

"Isn't he fine?" whispered Constance, after he had gone.

I nodded, for I found speech difficult.

"It's quite a nice appointment," she said presently. "He is to have £400 a year, and everything found. But it will be lonelier than Terranora. The nearest town is over a hundred miles from the homestead. I am firmly resolved not to let him put me off for longer than a few weeks. I know that he will try, but I shall not allow him to succeed."

"D'ye think you could find me a job up there, Miss Morland?"

"I don't think that I should care to try, Mr. Counsel. I'd not like to interfere with your prospects of making a fortune here."

"You are unkind to jeer at me."

She smiled, enigmatically. "Would you really like to spend your life as a rouseabout?"

"Not that, but——"

"But you are upset and discouraged, and tired of everything, eh?"

"Not of everything, Miss Morland."

"Of me?" and she looked me in the eye.

I stood up, and so did she. "I know what you mean," I said, unsteadily. "It's you, all over, to want to champion a failure, even at the biggest of all prices. But I'm not going to let you, dear."

"Ah, Tommy!" she cried, "I'm not the ministering angel you believe. I am aching and craving to be comforted. Can't you see?"

I clenched my hands, and looked beyond her through the window at the stars. "Your bad time will pass, little woman. You would be sorry afterwards, and I'd see it soon or late. Then life would be impossible for both of us, because I'd never have the grace to give you up."

"Tommy," she whispered, "without either of us knowing it, I have been your sweetheart for months. I found it out to-day when father told me that Wolaroi had lost. Ah! but it's a shame of you to make me propose to you—Tommy, dear."

Then she put her arms about my neck and drew my lips to hers.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

DR. DUCIE was sitting at the foot of my bed. "That girl of yours must have given you a sleeping draught," he complained. "I've been in a dozen times since breakfast, and seen my morning patients into the bargain. The seven sleepers were fools to you. How do you feel?"

"Fine, thank you, doctor. How——"

"How is Wolaroi, of course! Anyone would suppose the sun rose and sank especially for that ugly quadruped. All the same, I'll own up he's a bit of a wonder, Cliff."

"He is better?"

"Judging by his obstreperous behaviour, there never was anything much wrong with him. He drove my chauffeur out of the box with a mouth big enough to swallow a Brahmapootra rooster. Poor Soames got the fright of his life."

"The devil!" I shouted, and sprang out of bed. Five minutes later I was in the stall. Wolaroi greeted me with a whinny of delight, and rubbed his nose in my palm. I surveyed him with the stupidest astonishment. Life and vigour, as by some magic, had returned to him. His box was in a sad condition, but he was manifestly getting well. I set to work with hose and brush, and soon had his coat as bright as a new pin. Then I cleaned his box, and gave him half

a bale of hay to tread. The doctor joined me presently, and smilingly shared my ecstatic contemplation of Wolaroi's restored condition.

"Over-trained—unstrung!" he observed. "Humph!"

"Over-rated, too," I added, angrily.

"In a few days he'll be fit for work, bar accidents," declared the doctor.

"He's fit now," I cried.

"Don't lose your head," he protested. "That's the strychnine you perceive in his present spirits. He has answered to treatment like a page out of a text book; but we must not push him. Think what he looked and was last night!"

"Doctor," I said, half in underbreath, so hardy seemed my thought, "we could never get him right in a fortnight, after such a doping, for a two mile race?"

Doctor Ducie put his hand on my shoulder. "The horse is a wonder," he replied. "We shan't consider 'cants.' We'll wait and see how he progresses. Nature has endowed him with a steel-clad constitution."

A servant interrupted us. "Mr. Hilliard wants to speak to Mr. Clifford on the telephone."

I rushed into the house. "Ah! that you, Tommy," said the trainer's voice, "I'm speaking from the Post Office, Mentone. Yes, I got your mesage yesterday. How is the horse this morning?—Better? Good, I'm glad to hear it. Yes, I quite agree. Just as well to keep him where he is for a bit. That doctor friend of yours must be a good sort. Yes, I'll send in your baggage first thing to-morrow. Say, I've got two mounts for you this week. What? You can't take them. Oh! the Morlands. Going away, are they? It's all right, Tommy; I understand. Don't you worry. I'll engage young Bill Fawcett—Chris?

Not much! I fired Chris last night for good and all. We found clear proof in the finger prints that it was his bran mash. He's lucky to be out of gaol. All right, Tommy, I'll look you up during the week. Goodbye—say, but stay a second—what about scratching him for the Melbourne Cup? Better do it at once, and keep sweet with the public. What? You won't? Say, Tommy, you're not going dotty, are you? Now, boy, listen to me—Tush! Nonsense, Tommy; what if he does improve? Morphia! Tommy, I'm sorry to hear you talking like that. Didn't you hear what the vet said, yesterday? Well, well, please yourself; he's your horse, not mine. No, I'm not offended, Tommy; but I'm sorrier than I can say you've filled your mind with that sort of demented rubbish. The horse was beaten fair and square, and if you run him in the two mile, it's a million to one he'll finish last. No, Tommy, I'll not go back on you, of course. You ought to know me better than that. Run him by all means, if your heart is set on it. My name is yours to command. Right oh! Tommy. Good-bye."

"He was actually going in to scratch Wolaroi," I cried, and fell back gasping, "I stopped him, just in time. Only think of it. He might have done it before he rang me up."

"The point is he did not," said the doctor cheerfully. "Come in to your breakfast, my lad, and let me see what sort of an appetite good news can give a jockey."

I said nothing to either Constance or Mr. Morland about Wolaroi's recovery, and my renewed hopes of him. I wanted to; but I dared not take the risk of building another castle in Spain, which, if it were to fall, would merely increase the burdens already laid upon them. And they did not question me about the horse at all. I think they could not bring themselves

She broke down and wept, unrestrainedly, in my arms.

Welaroi's Cup. *Page 160.*

to formulate his name. On Monday after a settlement, that left me nearly penniless, I saw Mr. Morland off in the train. It was not a blithe leave-taking. Constance was very bright at the station; but, her father once gone, her spirits sank to zero, and during the drive out to Caulfield (the Sorensons lived quite close to Dr. Ducie), she broke down and wept, unrestrainedly, in my arms.

I resumed Wolaroi's training on the Wednesday. He galloped four furlongs in worse than even time—running like a horse made of wood.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LONG ODDS.

THAT four furlongs gallop was a facer. Over evens, and the horse had done his best! Next morning I took him by train to Sandringham, and gave him a long swim in the sea water. He enjoyed the exercise, and it seemed to take a lot of the stiffness from his stride; but I had only to feel his muscles to realise he had a long way to travel before touching form again.

Next day we let the horse rest. On the next, we gave him some more strychnine, and another swim at Sandringham. The treatment was purely empirical, but we had no option that either of us could discover. Probably, we should have done better to permit Dame Nature to fight out the battle unassisted. I have this opinion, now; because the horse began to make a notable improvement from the day we abandoned medicines in despair. But all was doubt and darkness then, and anxiety urged us to try to grope a short cut through the maze. It was a black day on which we passed the verdict—no more strychnine. I rode him over six furlongs that morning on the Caulfield tracks, and pulled up amid the scornful laughter of the touts. One twenty-eight was the time we made, and Wolaroi finished like a cart-horse.

Mr. Hilliard dropped in during the afternoon, and after a careful examination, begged me to let him use the scratching pen. I refused, but it was sheer

obstinacy that governed my refusal. Hilliard knew it, I fancy, but he was too pitiful to say so.

Before he went, he endeavoured to force a gift of money upon me, asserting strenuously that he had hedged and backed Dagonet for the Caulfield, partially on my account; but, as he was obliged to confess he had not "declared" a bet for me, I declined to profit by his generosity. I was glad enough, however to accept a loan of £100, and I also accepted part of a retainer of £200 to ride as the head jockey of his stable, our agreement dating from the Melbourne Cup. That was a Saturday. I gave Wolaroi no work that day, nor on the next. On Monday, I treated him to a short swim at Black Rock, and a long plugging gallop on the sands; then, instead of taking him back by train, I rode him all the way at a good sharp trot to Caulfield. It was a rather cruel experiment, but I was growing desperate. When we arrived home, he was pretty well blown and sweating fiercely. The doctor had just returned from a round of sick calls.

"Not a bad notion," he observed. "He may be stiff to-morrow, but there'll not be much poison left in his system, I should say. The skin is a grand organ of excretion, Cliff."

Wolaroi's appetite was the first real sign I got that he had come out of the woods. On Tuesday morning, for the first time since the Caulfield debacle, I found his feed box as clean as a whistle; and he was still hungry. I gave him walking exercise only that day, but on Wednesday I tried him over five furlongs, untimed, at the back of the course, after most of the touts had gone, and he not only moved freely, he fought me at the finish. On Thursday I let him do a mile and a half at three-quarter pace, on the sand, and he completed his task so nicely, that

I began to ask questions of my half-dead hopes. Dr. Ducie handed me a bookmaker's price-list at dinner. "Dagonet is still a hot favourite at sevens," he remarked. "Everybody seems to think there is only one horse in the race." I smoothed out the paper and looked for the name of Wolaroi—to find he stood 100 to 1.

I glanced up, and met Ducie's eyes. "A long price, Cliff, what?"

"You think he has a chance?" I cried.

"Don't you, boy? I'm not a vet, but Wolaroi looks to me a healthy horse again. His coat can't lie, and his last two gallops seem to have made a new man out of you. But, there, I must own up; I tested his blood pressure this morning unbeknown to you. It was very good. Well, what have you to say?"

"Nothing, until I see how he goes to-morrow. I'm going to send him for a mile on the tan at his top at the lunch hour. The track will be deserted then, but I'll get a time-keeper I can trust, if you'll take on the job."

"Gladly, my boy."

Promptly, at one o'clock, we invaded the training track, and the doctor took up his position, chronometer in hand. There were very few people about, and most of them were nursemaids with perambulators. I did not see a single turfite, except the keeper of the course, and he paid us scant attention. It was a standing-start job, and I used the whip against my custom and much to Wolaroi's surprise and indignation, for he was bursting out of his skin with eagerness. He was at his top speed in half-a-furlong, and I kept him there the whole way. I rode him right out, indeed; but, nevertheless, he fought me like a tiger when I went to pull him up. That pleased me inexpressibly.

"Never mind the time," I muttered, as I got him round at last and rode towards the doctor. "Bad, or good, I guess now you've got a chance for the Cup. You are yourself again, old horse."

There was a man standing near the doctor when I reached him—a man I knew by sight as a tout, and one of the worst. He had suddenly appeared from nowhere. But there was no chance to warn Ducie in words, and he ignored my signal to be silent.

"Well done, Cliff," he shouted. "Just a tick under one forty-nine. The horse is getting quite his old self again."

"Thanks!" I replied, in a quick passion of disgust. "I'll make you a present of the time and the horse, too. One forty-nine won't win races!"

The tout laughed, and turned away. Ducie did not open his lips again until I had rubbed Wolaroi down and put him back in his box. He watched me, smiling queerly. At last he said: "Nice temper, that of yours, Cliff. Got it under control again?"

"I reckon so, doc. I'm feeling pretty cheap. What was the real time? That smile of yours means something, I suppose."

"Ah, but you'll feel cheaper presently, my lad. Have a guess?"

"One forty-six?"

"Try again."

"One forty-four?"

"Again!"

"Oh! damn guessing, doctor, I'm on hot needles. What was it?"

"One forty-three, and barely that. And I made no mistake about it. If there's any error, it lies on the right side. Cliff, the horse is a miracle. You and I are going right into town to back him for the Cup.

I'm no gambler, as a rule, but the fever has caught me, and, for once in my life, I'm going to do a plunge."

"One forty-three!" I gasped. "We didn't seem to go as fast as that. Are you sure, doctor?"

"Haven't I spent half my life timing pulse beats, boy? Hurry up and change your clothes. Never forget that that tout may have had the watch out, too. But we'll beat him into the city if you shake a leg."

We were in Collins Street in twenty minutes, and promptly commenced a round of the betting offices. I had a credit balance of £150 to speculate. The doctor proposed to invest £200. The first bookmaker we saw, Joe McGrath, the giant, let us have £8,000 to £40. We got half as much from Harry Deebles, and £6,000 at a slightly shorter figure from Bill Wishart and Jim Alder. Of the smaller fry, we only found two who would quote us 100 to one, and the rest dwindled to as low as forties, but we had no call to growl. When we had booked all we could get we sat down to a late lunch at the Savoy and made up accounts between the courses. We found that the doctor stood to win £27,000, and I £22,500 for the hour's work. As I had backed Wolaroi for £18,000, prior to his defeat, I owned an aggregate of £40,500 in straight out bets; and, as Hilliard had noted three wagers on our joint account of £1,000 to nothing from Tattersall ticket holders, a fortune of £42,000 stared me in the face, apart from prize money.

The doctor shook his head over the totals. "Cliff," he said, "we have caught the bookies napping. They'll know it pretty soon, and then we shall have to look out for trouble."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's my firm opinion that they were responsible for the doping of the horse at Caulfield. I know

you have set the trick down to Chris Key, but I never thought so. The man who patted Wolaroi's neck in the bird cage was no tyro. He had done the same thing many a time before, if I am any judge; and an expert like him would be sure to demand a big wage—a wage no mere jockey could afford to pay. He was a bookmaker's man, Cliff, for sure. Remember, lad, the horse was not only first favourite in the big ring; he had been backed heavily in all quarters by the public."

"If you are right," I answered slowly, "they may try it on again."

"Precisely. My tip is we must guard Wolaroi as we would our eyes, down to the very last minute. When the day comes, and you go to weigh in—I'll mount sentry go—and if any stranger attempts to fondle the horse, I'll plug him good and proper. In the meantime, I'll padlock both my gates, and I'll pack Soames off for a holiday this evening. We'll trust nobody but our two selves, and we'll take watch and watch every night."

We sealed the compact with a handshake, and went straight home. Next morning, Wolaroi ran four furlongs on the sand in fifty-one seconds, and fifty watches timed the going. I discovered the reason when I sat down to breakfast. The doctor handed me a price-list. Wolaroi was quoted at 20 to 1, and Dagonet, in sympathy, had lengthened a point.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WOLAROI'S CUP.

ON the eve of the race, Dr. Ducie took first watch, while I strolled to the Sorensens to see Constance. She met me at the gate, and we went to the lower summer house. I felt at once that something was wrong with her, and guessed at the cause.

"You have heard from your father."

She nodded sadly. "He says it will be impossible for me to go to him for another month, at least. The house is in the hands of the contractors. He is batching with the hands. Tommy, I just hate to think of him alone in such a place. Every mouthful I eat almost chokes me. I know, you see, what he is having —damper and salt beef. It will kill him. He absolutely needs good cooking. Even up at Terranora ——" but she could not proceed for the trembling of her voice.

I drew her close and whispered: "Darling, ever since Caulfield Cup night you have never asked me about Wolaroi. Don't shrink, little girl. I know the sound of that name hurts you. But listen. He has made a fine recovery. Yesterday morning he galloped a mile and a-quarter on the sand track, and he smashed every previous record for the distance. I am going to ride him to-morrow in the Melbourne Cup. Will you do me a real big favour, darling?"

She squeezed my hand and nodded.

"I know the Sorensons want you to go to Flemington with them, for you told me so last week. I want you to go."

'Oh! Tommy, why?"

"Because I have a presentiment that to-morrow's race will be the last I shall ever ride, and I want my girl to see it run."

"Tommy!" she cried, "you expect to win. I can feel your heart beating."

"Yes, dearest of women, I expect to win. If I do——"

"If you do," she echoed in a stifled voice, and her body stiffened in my arms.

"Your father will not need to stay at Tareel Downs, nor you to go to him."

"Oh, Tommy!" she gasped.

I stood up, and drew her to her feet before me. "You'll go to Flemington, girlie?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Oh! boy, my dearest boy, if you should win!"

. . . .

The morning of the great race dawned with radiant promise of a splendid day. The sky was sapphire blue and cloudless; the air was still, and clear and cool. Just as the sun was rising, I rode Wolaroi to the training track and paid an extra fee to run him on the grass. He was as playful as a kitten, and he moved with the peculiar effortless grace of action that had always marked him out in my experience from every other horse that I had ridden. It was a gait to send streams of confidence into the most apprehensive rider's heart; for it told of a tremendous power of achievement and inexhaustible reserves of strength.

Three of Walter Sedley's horses joined up for the sprint. They were well up to the average for size, but the big black towered up beside them like a little mountain, and he made hacks of them in the three furlongs dash. "Thirty-eight and a fifth," shouted several touts in chorus, as we strode back. It was moderate time; but, then, Wolaroi had not been at his top, and—if the touts had but guessed it—he had carried ten pounds over-weight. The morning passed, a trance of drawn-out, fevered expectation. But I was calm and master of myself when we reached Flemington at last. Seventy-seven was the number of our box. We stalled Wolaroi, and had a farrier attend to his plates before even the earliest of the regulars appeared. Thenceforward, while Wolaroi nibbled at his box, the doctor and I mounted guard, immovably.

Hilliard joined us a little before the first race. He had no horse running in the Cup, but several belonging to different owners in other events on the card. Wolaroi's fine condition astonished him, yet his only comment was a gesture of disgust. "Dagonet will win," he asserted, as he went away. The public paid homage to that horse, as though he were an Emperor. Only stragglers vouchsafed a glance at Wolaroi, and most of them insulted him with mordant references to his inglorious finish in the Caulfield Cup. A few moments before I went to dress, Hilliard arrived and took charge of our horse, but the doctor's eyes assured me that I need not fear. But, there was no repetition of the Caulfield incident. When I returned, the trainer and Ducie remained Wolaroi's only attendants. I mounted without delay, and suffered Hilliard to lead me to the course. Constance Morland was waiting near the gate, and I knew at a glance why

she had not come to visit Wolaroi before. She was dressed exactly as upon the day when first I saw her —in shimmering white tulle, with a snow-white feather hat, and shoes to match. Just as once, long ago, she looked directly into my eyes. "You will win on my dream-horse to-day, boy," she said, softly.

And I nodded at her just as stupidly, my face aflame, because of memories.

"You will," she insisted.

"Yes," I answered. Then she smiled and stepped back, and I rode on to the course. Wolaroi was the first horse out. I have said that his box in the paddock was numbered 77. The position I had drawn for him at the barrier was seventh from the rails. Constance had named him her dream-horse. And the number on his saddle-cloth was seventeen. Traumerei had carried the same number on the first day I ever rode with the colours. And Traumerei had won!

"We cannot lose to-day, old man," I told Wolaroi, gravely; and as I live the old fellow snorted and shook his head. Hard-faced boys and men asked me questions, as I passed along the crowded picket—questions about my chances. I smiled, and nodded to them all. Wolaroi accomplished his preliminary with the patience of a stager. He was not eager yet. The fire of battle did not touch him till we paced in company behind the barrier. It was a numerous and splendid field, and it comprised twenty-four of the best tried and most sterling horses in Australia. I looked them over, one by one, and all were good; but Dagonet caught and held the eye quite irresistibly. "In a class by himself," was the popular word concerning him; and, truly, it was justified. He was a more beautifully-shaped animal than Wolaroi. His lines, indeed, lacked very little of classical perfection. He seemed

in the very pink of health. I knew that he could stay. For one base moment I was pricked with doubt. As though Wolaroi divined my treachery and resented, he propped of a sudden, then lashed out with both heels at a horse named Morning Star, only missing him by a hair-breadth.

Wolaroi could not understand the delay, and he began to play-up so shockingly, that I had more than I could do to manage him, and was presently commanded to take him to a distance. All things pass, however; even barrier parades, and at last the wires were ordered down. Beyond my wildest hopes, Wolaroi pressed into his place and kept it, like a circus hack—the quietest horse on the line. The hour for business had struck, and he knew it. The start was not of the first water, for two horses were left rather badly. Wolaroi got well away, however, and he led for the first two furlongs. At that point, I spoke into his ears and felt his mouth; and so sweetly did he answer that we were seventh from the lead, but on the rails, when, for the first time round, we passed the judges' box. Always I kept talking to him and explaining what he ought to do, and why.

"We've got a big journey to travel, old fellow, we'll do it right enough; but it's not only a question of distance. We've simply got to nurse our strength, for we might be pocketed towards the finish, and have to pull out and come round. That's why we'll keep where we are, as long as we can. But not if we are crowded. Never mind that fellow, Wol., let him pass us, and that horse, too. We'll down them later on. Yes, I know, old chap, it's beastly having dirt flung up in your face like that, isn't it? But it's part of the game, Wol., and you are here because you are the sort that doesn't crawfish at a trifle. Steady, boy; let him pass us, too

—we've a mile to go yet, and we're not running for the books. Ha! there's Dagonet! He's moving up. That's our cue, Wol. That's what I've been waiting for. See! he's making for that middle berth. I see his game. He knows the bunch will open going round the turn, and he'll go through them like a rocket. On to his girths, Wol. No, boy, always on the outside of him. That's the ticket! No more rails for us. That's where the pocketing will be—not where we are. We're safe from pocketing with Dagonet."

When I said that last, "Dagonet," we were straining towards the turn about six furlongs, more or less, from home. The field was then strung out a deal, but there was a solid bunch of horses disputing for the lead, some lengths ahead of us, and Dagonet was waiting behind them near the centre of the course, running like a train. Wolaroi crept slowly forward, until he lay nose on Dagonet's outer girth, and the big black galloped always as easily as I could wish. Thus we raced along the home stretch, never moving a hand's length from our places—Dagonet and Wolaroi, I mean, for I scarcely looked at the bunch. The swing into the straight did precisely what I had foreseen. The leading horse, either by some knack of running or piece of luck, stuck closely to the rails, but the others ran out wide, and in a fraction of a second the whole brigade was scattered right across the track. Like a bolt from a gun, Dagonet shot through the straggling, struggling band, and reached the foremost of the runners in a twinkling. The performance was magnificently timed and executed perfectly. But although Dagonet, a second later, had secured the lead, he was under the whip and doing his utmost, whereas, we were still

running comfortably, with plenty in hand and whip idle, on his girth. Wolaroi had stuck to him without an effort, and—already we had his measure. At the distance, Dagonet's jockey turned and looked at us. His face went sheet-white in a flash. "I'll save you a hundred, Tommy," he shouted gaspingly.

"Not a farthing," I answered.

It was Chris Key.

"Damn you," he yelled, "I'll beat you yet!" and he set to work with whip and spur, in a fashion that I could not bear to see. I shook Wolaroi up, and called on him for all he had to give. The grand old black answered with a great heaving and gathering up of all his parts.

"The longest-sustained and most-withering run ever seen at Flemington," said the papers, afterwards.

We passed Dagonet, slowly, yet with consummate ease, and were a length to the good at the middle distance, from which point we drew right away from the beaten favourite, and won, eventually, by something more than half-a-dozen lengths.

Perhaps a couple of thousand cheered as we rode to the enclosure, but fully twenty thousand cheered Dagonet, the second horse. Evidently, Wolaroi had disgusted the public by his bad defeat at Caulfield. It was not the pleasantest experience to be so censured by the crowd; but it braced me like a tonic, and I had need of a tonic in that dazzling and most trying hour. The hand-shaking and questioning began even before I had left the scales. I was obliged to dress in a room filled with clamant press-men, and, after the stewards had done with me, I had to fight my way into the paddock. Hilliard and Dr. Ducie were waiting by the box; and two grooms were rubbing down the champion before a seething semi-circle of excited

spectators. Ducie merely nodded to me, but his glance was worth many phrases. Hilliard shone out like a trump.

"I backed Dagonet, but I'm glad you won, Tommy," he said earnestly.

Ducie and I took Wolaroi home together, and we spread him a feast of carrots, turnip tops and apples.

"No more races for you this season, old horse," said Ducie.

"No more races for him, ever," I declared

Two hours later, I went round to the Sorensons. I knew exactly where to find her. She had not changed her gown, but she had taken off her hat, and her lovely hair was shining near as brightly as her eyes. She put her hands upon my shoulders and I clasped mine on her wrists.

"You did all that I asked you, boy?" she said.

"All," I answered. "For, though you did not ask in words, I knew you wished me to let your father know. An urgent telegram went off to him by pre-arrangement within twenty seconds of the race. We shall surely hear from him to-night."

"His reply has already come," she confessed. "He is starting for Melbourne town, immediately."

"Is that all he said?" I demanded.

She blushed slowly and deeply. "Not quite all, boy. To what did you ask him to consent?"

"That we may be married—next week," I answered boldly. Then her eyes wavered, her breath faltered, and she swayed into my arms.

Finis.

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